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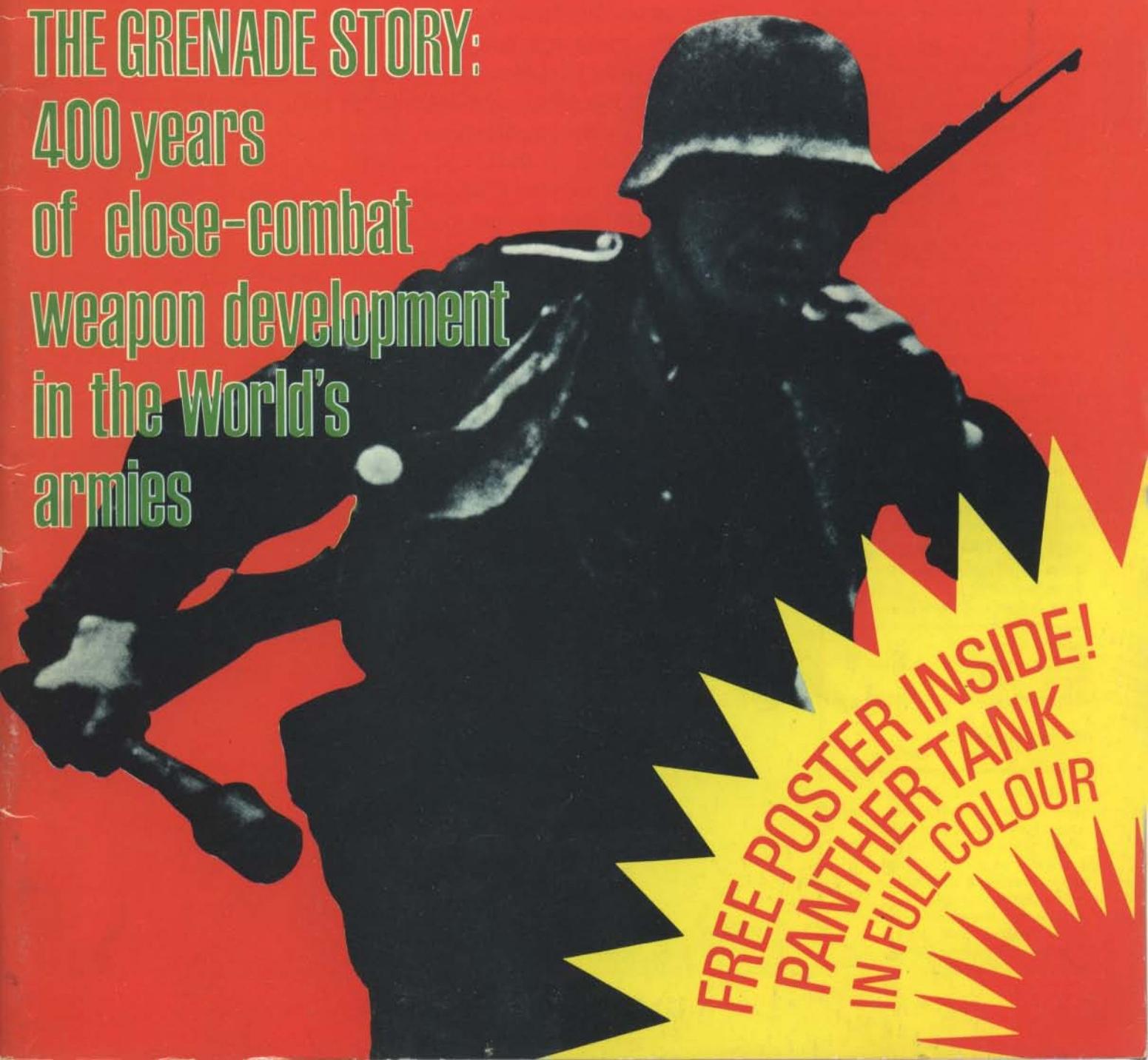
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of close-combat
weapon development
in the World's
armies



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WAR MONTHLY

ISSUE 21

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► *The Panther's protection!*
They may be veterans of the
highly trained Grossdeutschland
Panzergrenadier Division of
the Wehrmacht, but they still
shelter thankfully behind
the considerable bulk of
a Panther during an advance
on the Russian Front. The
Panther was the best German
tank in World War II.

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What was World War II's finest tank? The Tiger's mighty, hard-hitting 88mm gun had a fearsome reputation. But the Germans knew the Panther with its balanced design of fire-power, mobility and protection, to be their best AFV. The next issue of WAR MONTHLY will include the full story of the Panther tank—the tank that might have won the war for Germany

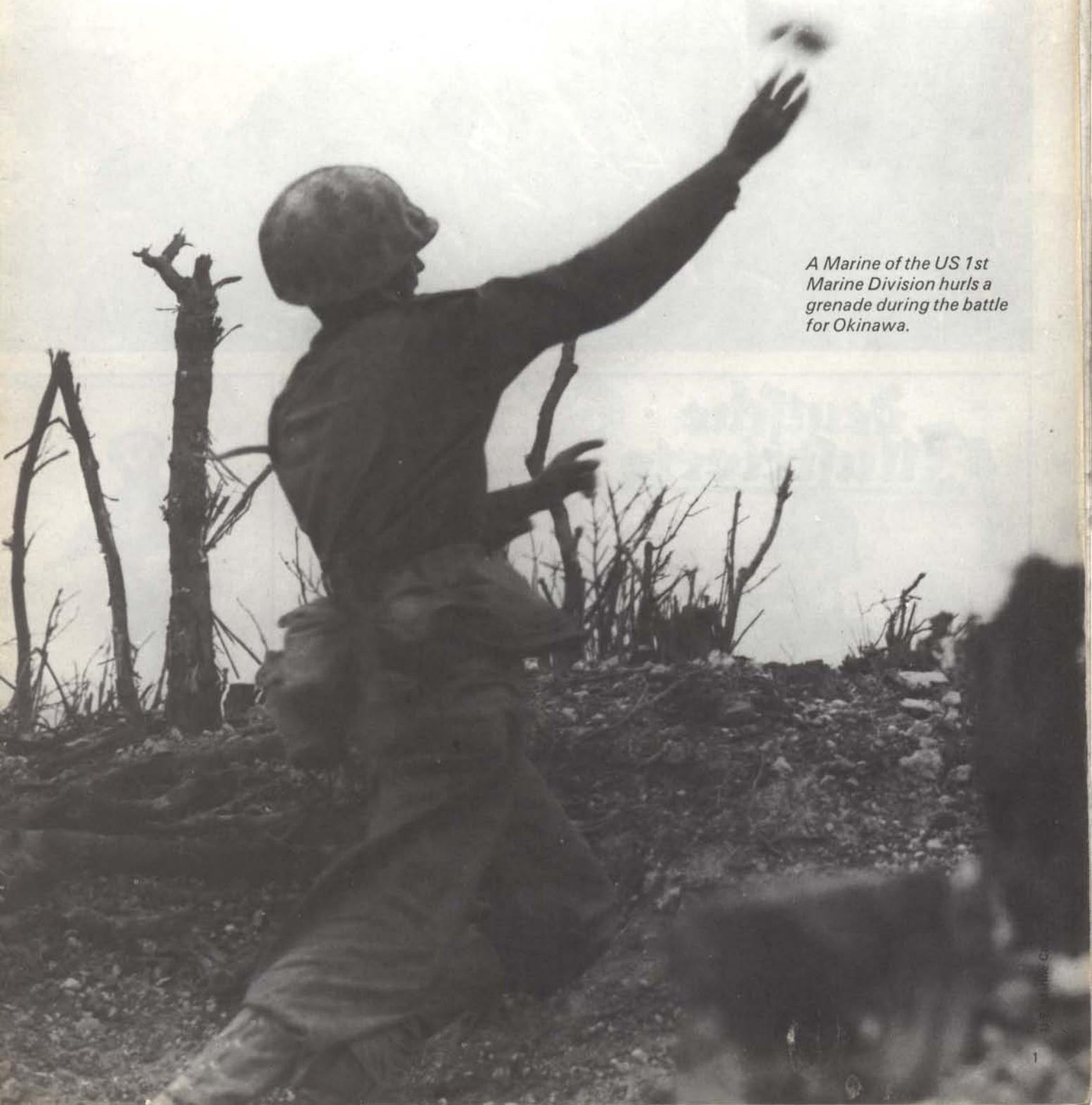


GRENADES

Four-hundred years of
grenade development

There are two schools of thought concerning the origin of the word 'grenade'. Some say it has its roots in the Latin 'granatus'—filled with grains. Others insist that it comes from the Spanish word for pomegranate—'granada'. Early examples of the weapon closely resembled that fruit in both shape and size. The equipment lent its name to the men who used it—the Grenadiers. They became the elite of their regiments. By the middle of the nineteenth century the grenade's popularity was on the wane and Grenadier companies were being disbanded—but the name lives on in the titles of crack troops of many armies—the *Panzer-grenadiers*, the Grenadier Guards....

The original type of grenade was not very different—except in size—from the modern mortar or howitzer shell—



*A Marine of the US 1st
Marine Division hurls a
grenade during the battle
for Okinawa.*



2



1 September 1917. British troops are trying to destroy German dug outs at Polygon Wood. They are using the 'Mills Bomb' for the purpose. With this grenade, the thrower needed to take cover as the blast was lethal at quite a long range.

2 An NCO of the German Grossdeutschland Brigade pictured about to throw a Steilhandgranate on the cover of the magazine 'German Illustrated'.

3 Japanese infantryman in the act of hurling a Type 91 grenade at a US Marine tank. Seconds later, he was dead.

4 Steilhandgranate was first introduced in 1915 and remained in service (with minor modifications) until 1945. Here it is in action at Verdun, 1916.

5 1942. Entrenched Italian troops prepare to fire an anti-tank grenade. The model shown here resembles the German Panzerwurfmine.

Imperial War Museum

3





Kevin MacDonnell

no more than a hollow ball of iron, brass, earthenware or even glass, containing gunpowder and fitted with a simple quickmatch fuze. The thrower lit the fuze and the official handbooks of the day observed, somewhat unnecessarily, that: 'men should be warned not to retain the grenade in their hands for long after lighting it'. The grenade's primary use was as a defensive weapon—thrown, dropped or rolled down troughs from the ramparts of a fort so as to land in the ditch beneath and burst among storming parties trying to break into the fort.

Grenades were certainly used in warfare as long ago as

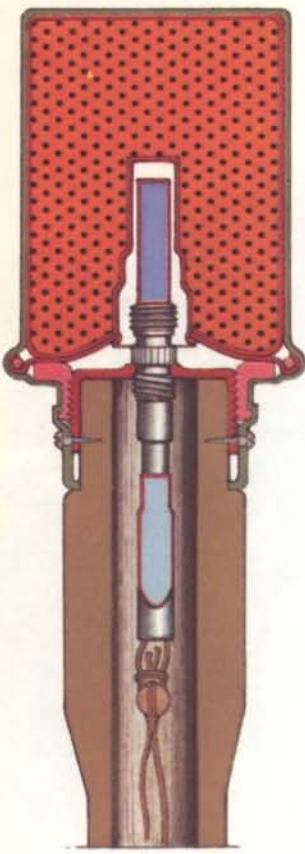
the early sixteenth century. They were used 'to good effect' in 1536 at the Siege of Arles. These weapons were usually no more than earthenware pots filled with gunpowder. They were ignited by a smouldering wick pushed into the neck and held in position by clay. With the slow advance of infantry weapons, these primitive weapons seem to have fallen more and more into disuse until, during the Napoleonic Wars, they were hardly ever employed. They did not disappear altogether—reappearing for example at Saragossa in 1808, the Siege of Antwerp in 1832, Sebastopol in the Crimean War and the Sudan in Sir Garnet Wolseley's 1884

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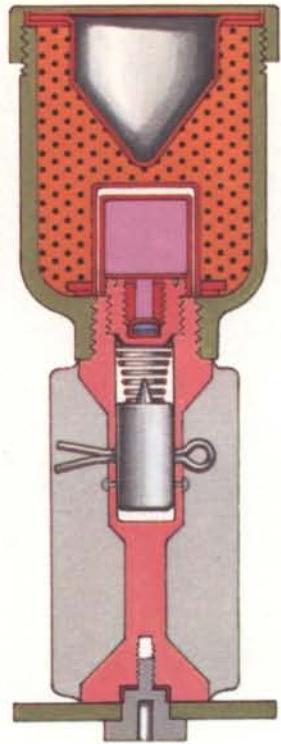
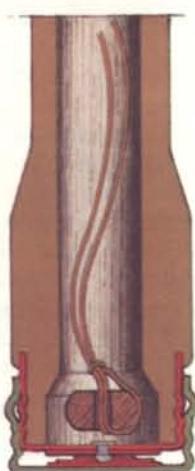


U.S. Navy Dept.

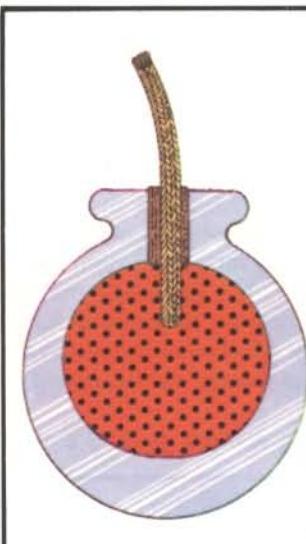
Zennaro



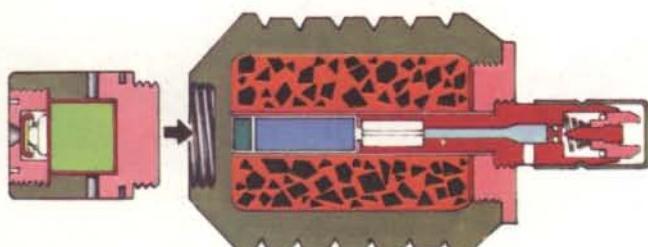
◀ The Stick Grenade (Steilhandgranate) was known to the British Army of World War I as the 'Potato-Masher'. This model is the Stg24, which appeared after the war and remained in service until 1945. In all important respects, however, it is the same as the type issued in 1915. The Stick Grenade operated by having a friction igniter inside the handle. The end cap unscrewed to reveal a porcelain bead on the end of a length of string. Pulling the string jerked a roughened pin through a friction-sensitive chemical inside the igniter which flashed and lit the five-second fuze. This burned through as the grenade travelled through the air and—depending on the thrower's good judgement—fired the grenade at the moment of landing. Unlike earlier grenades, there were no serrated iron rings or casings. The body was made of sheet iron, which blew into tiny fragments on bursting. These were lethal at close range but fairly harmless at 20 yards or more from the burst. The 'Potato-Masher' was an offensive grenade—one which can be thrown by an attacking soldier, safe in the knowledge that he can throw it farther than the lethal fragments can fly. Accuracy was needed.



◀ The British 'Grenade, Rifle, No68/AT' was one of the first grenade designs of World War II. It was also the first 'hollow charge' grenade to enter service in any army. This principle relies on a shaped cavity in an explosive charge. When detonated, the cavity acts to 'focus' the detonation force—blowing a hole through the target in front of it. The 68 Grenade was produced in the early days of hollow charge design. Nobody knew how or why it worked. The cavity's shape is not ideal, and there is no 'stand off' (space between bomb and target to allow focussing effect to occur). It could penetrate two inches of armor plate—remarkable for 1940.



◀ Glass grenades like the one shown here were used right up to the 1850s. They were much lighter than grenades with metal bodies. On burst they inflicted savage flesh wounds if they were properly tempered. Otherwise, the bomb shattered into thousands of harmless particles. Originally they were fuzed by a tube pushed into the neck, containing mealed powder priming. These had a tendency to go out before reaching the target.

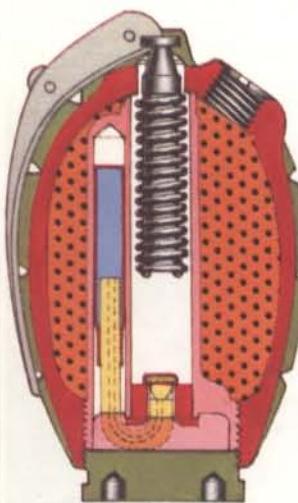


Charge
Detonator

Casing

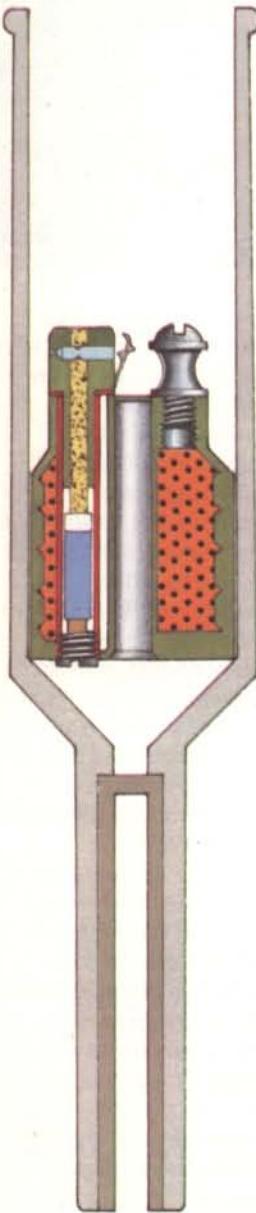
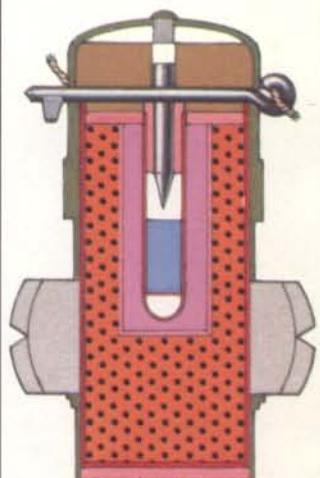
◀ The most common and versatile of all Japanese grenades of 1939-45—the Type 91. In its hand grenade role, it consisted of a serrated cast iron body containing explosive, a central detonator and an igniter unit—a firing pin held away from a detonator by a light spring and secured by a safety pin. To operate, the pin was removed and the igniter tip smashed

down on a handy hard surface—driving the pin into the detonator. A finned tail unit could be screwed into a socket at the base to make a rifle grenade—fired by a blank charge from a standard rifle with barrel extension. By screwing a propellant/cartridge into the base, the grenade became a mortar bomb—used with the Type 89.



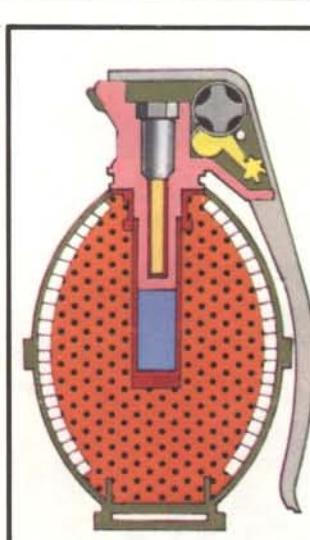
△ British 'Mills Bomb' patented by Mr. W. Mills of Birmingham and issued in May 1915 as 'Grenade, Hand, No5'. A defensive grenade, its cast iron case splintered into fragments on burst. Some of these were lethal at long range. The thrower was within lethal range of the blast and needed to take cover. The 'Mills' was operated by a spring-loaded striker. The lever was locked by a safety pin until needed. The thrower held the lever

against the body when pulling the pin. The lever flew off in mid-air and the striker dropped—striking a cap and lighting a five second fuze. In 1916, the 'Mills' was adapted to take a 5½in rifle rod and became 'Grenade, Hand and Rifle No 23'. This was later improved by using a 'cup discharger' launching method. A 2½in diameter baseplate was fitted to the 'Mills'. It became the 'Grenade, Hand and Rifle No36'. The 'Mills' retired in the 1970s.

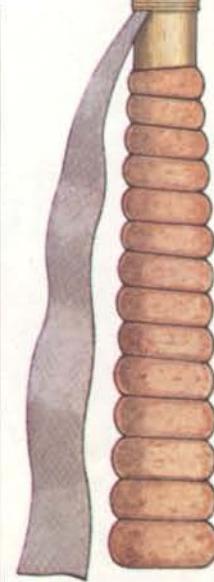


△ Developed by the French in World War I, the Vivien Bessier grenade was launched from a discharger cup on a rifle's muzzle with a standard ball cartridge. A hole ran through the central axis of the grenade body. The bullet passed through this. Expanding gas behind the bullet sent the grenade to a considerable range. The bullet carried on its journey—depressing a firing pin arm, which lit a five-second fuze—detonating the bomb.

△ The British Army designed 'Grenade, Hand, No 1' of June 1908. Its cap carried a fixed firing pin. Before throwing, this was removed and a mining detonator inserted into a hole in the Lyddite filling. The cap was then replaced—a safety pin preventing contact between pin and detonator. Grooves on the cap, mating with lugs on the body, held the cap in place when the safety pin was pulled out. The 36in braid streamer ensured the grenade landed nose first. The 16in cane handle was cut to 8½in in the Mark 2 model to reduce accidents in the trenches.



British L2A1 AP Grenade
△ A coil of notched steel in a thin metal case is used. The filling is RDX/TNT with a 4 second fuze. On burst, the coil breaks into about 1,200 equal pieces—moving at 5,000 fps. The resulting cloud is lethal within five yards. But at 1/200oz, the fragments are safe over 10 yards from the burst. There is a rifle-launching adaptor. This, used with a muzzle-adaptor and blank cartridge, fires the grenade to 150 yards range.





Imperial War Museum



1 Soviet soldiers armed with the Model 14/30 stick grenade. It has a shorter stock, but, in all important respects, resembles the German Steilhandgranate.

2 The Grenade Launching Pistol (Kampf pistol) with fitted butt in action during World War II. This weapon worked on the 'hollow charge' principle (explained on page 4) and was chiefly used in an anti-tank role. The British opposite number to this weapon was the 'Grenade, Rifle, No 68/AT'.

3 The Pacific theater saw some of the most savage fighting of World War II. As elsewhere, here on Tarawa the Japanese had to be literally blown up before their resistance was quelled. The grenade came into its own.

4 An Italian infantryman with Steilhandgranate at the ready. This highly efficient grenade was standard issue to Axis forces.

Imperial War Museum



U.S. Marine Corps.



4 expedition to rescue General Charles Gordon. But these were rare contributions, and had only a minimal effect on those campaigns. The official handbooks of the 1870s dismiss the grenade in a few sentences, which say—more or less—that it was an archaic hangover.

Hand grenades came into their own again during the Russo-Japanese War. In 1904, bitter fighting around Port Arthur led to trench warfare and raiding parties. Very soon, makeshift hand grenades made their debut and were soon replaced by properly manufactured models. A decade later, World War I produced a welter of grenade designs which, sophisticated as they may have looked, were not much better in many respects than the primitive objects of the 1500s.

The 1920s and 30s saw the abandonment of the less reliable designs. Work began at a casual pace on the development of an 'ideal grenade'—a grenade to suit everybody. But little progress appears to have been made.

Renewed hostilities in 1939 sparked off the next great advance in grenade technology. The progress made in World War II has continued ever since.

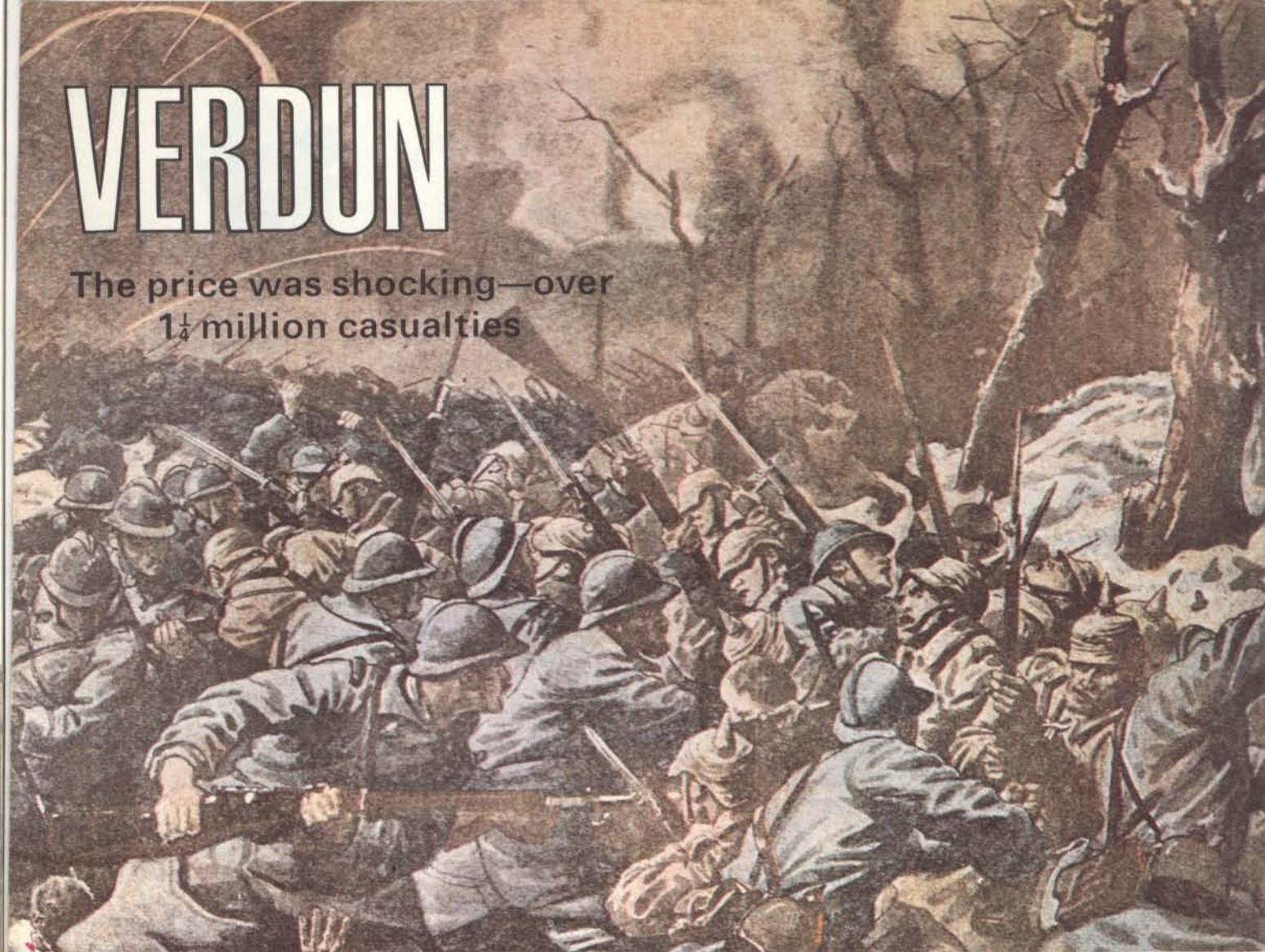
Instead of being satisfied with a good rousing bang, today's soldier demands high lethality, reliability and accuracy from his grenades. The designers are constantly hard at work trying to keep him happy. At the time of writing, techniques of controlling fragmentation, restricting the area of lethality and improving fusing are all being explored. As the last of the ageing, slightly primitive, grenades are finally removed from service, the sophisticated products of 70's technology begin to take their place.

In the last 70 years, between four and five hundred grenade designs have been developed. This feature describes and illustrates a selection of the more notable models.

Ian Hogg

VERDUN

The price was shocking—over
1½ million casualties



In choosing Verdun as the main German objective for 1916, General Erich von Falkenhayn, Chief of the German General Staff and Minister for War, pre-dated the jibe that the British would fight to the last man in the armies of their allies. Falkenhayn reasoned that, for the British, the European fronts in World War I represented nothing more than a sideshow, with the Russian, Italian and French armies as their whipping boys. The Italians and Russians, Falkenhayn believed, were already foundering on their own ineptitude. Only France remained.

'France has almost arrived at the end of her military effort', Falkenhayn wrote to the German Kaiser Wilhelm II in December 1915. 'If we succeeded in opening the eyes of her people to the fact that in a military sense they have nothing more to hope for . . . breaking point would be reached, and England's best sword knocked out of her hand . . . Behind the French sector on the Western Front, there are objectives for the retention of which the French General Staff would be compelled to throw in every man they have. If they do so, the forces of France will bleed to death, as there can be no question of a voluntary withdrawal.'

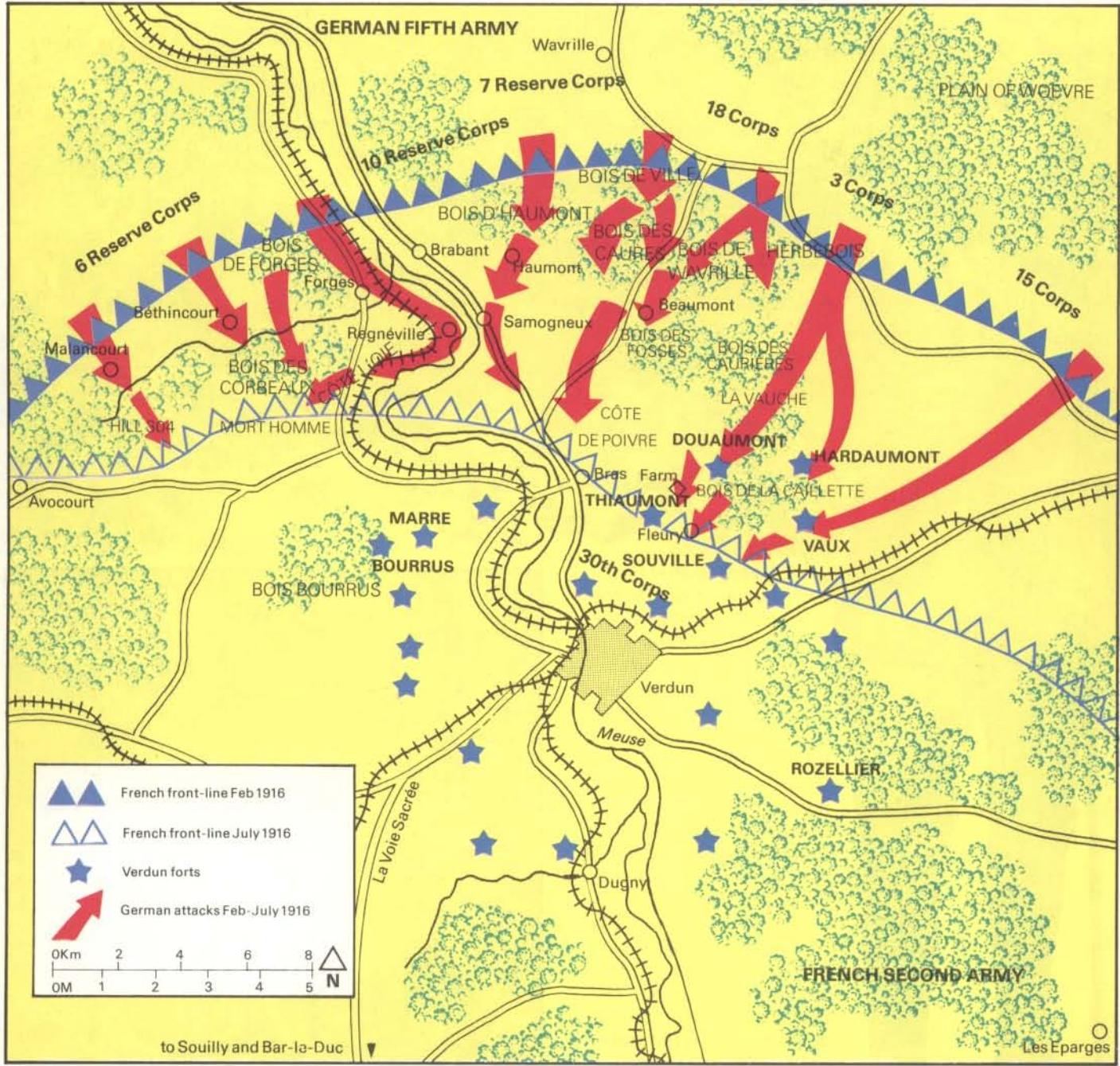
The objective Falkenhayn chose to put France in this moral and military dilemma was the massively fortified town of Verdun, on the canalized river Meuse. Verdun fitted Falkenhayn's bill admirably. It had immense historic and emotional significance for the French and formed the northern lynch-pin of the double defense line of fortifications built to protect France's eastern frontier after the

△ A contemporary print from the French magazine *Petit Journal* paints a glamorous picture of the fighting.

The Krupp railway-mounted naval gun that opened the 10-month struggle for Verdun by hitting the Bishop's Palace at a range of 20 miles and with its sister gun soon cut Verdun's one rail link.

Weight 265 tons
Length 137ft 9in
Barrel length 56ft
Calibre 380mm (15in)
Shell weight 1,652lb
Muzzle velocity 2,625fps
Elevation 18.5°
Traverse 4°





38cm SCHIFFSKANONE L/45 'MAX' EISENBAHN GERÜST





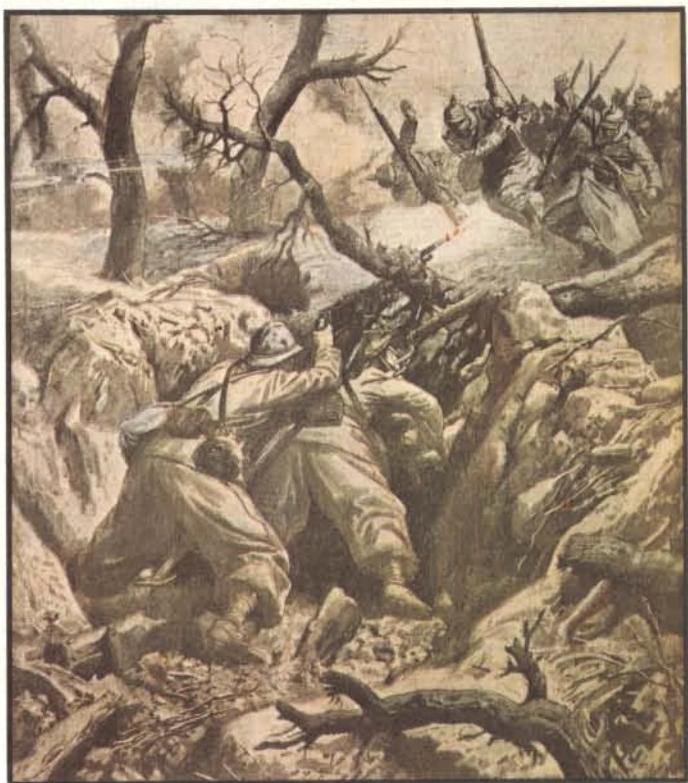
△ Verdun after the battle—more like the surface of the Moon than rural France.

◀ One of the lionized captors of Ft. Douaumont, Oberleutnant von Brandis, CO of 8th Kompagnie, Infanterie Regiment Grossherzog (Grand Duke) Friedrich Franz II von Mecklenberg-Schwerin (4 Brandenburgisches) Nr. 24 in III Armee Korps. Brandis wears the 1910 officer's uniform with an Iron Cross 1st Class above his Luger holster and the 2nd Class above his binoculars. The pickelhaube bears the regt. number and has the spike removed for active service. Brandis won the Pour le Mérite at Douaumont.

▷ A Petit Journal depiction of Hotchkiss machine-gunners.

Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. Mount an assault here, with enough threatening potential, Falkenhayn reckoned, and the French Army would be inextricably lured to Verdun and mangled to extinction by the Germans. The mangle would be provided by a series of limited, but attritionist advances, intensively supported by artillery and spiced with surprise.

Falkenhayn's proposals appealed to the Kaiser and to his son, Crown Prince Wilhelm, whose Fifth Army had been pounding away at Verdun with little success since 1914. But the prince and his Chief of Staff, General Schmidt von Knobelsdorf, seemed to see the Verdun campaign more in terms of shattering the French with a bombardment than of bleeding them dry by attrition. Wilhelm, who wanted to



attack on both sides of the Meuse, not on the right bank only, as Falkenhayn proposed, stated the campaign's purpose as 'capturing the fortress of Verdun by precipitate methods'. Compared with this fierce phraseology, Falkenhayn's notion of 'an offensive in the Meuse area in the direction of Verdun' seemed enigmatic. Despite the suitably malevolent code-name of Operation *Gericht* ('Judgement') given to his offensive, Falkenhayn's essentially half-hearted approach to it planted the seeds of ultimate German failure at Verdun. Basically, that failure was rooted in Falkenhayn's timid choice of too narrow a front for the initial attack and also on his extreme parsimony in doling out reserves.

Although Crown Prince Wilhelm and others seemed to suspect this outcome, preparations for the campaign went

ahead as Falkenhayn had originally planned. It did so at a pace remarkable for those leisurely times. Weeks, rather than the usual months, divided Falkenhayn's preliminary consultations with the Kaiser at Potsdam on or about 20 December 1915 from the issue of final orders on 27 January 1916 and the projected attack date of 12 February.

'Superlative' secrecy

During this period, the Germans amassed in the forests that surrounded Verdun a massive force of 140,000 men and over 1,200 guns—850 of them in the front line—together with 2½ million shells brought by 1,300 munitions trains, and an air arm of 168 aircraft as well as observation balloons. A superlative standard of secrecy was achieved by deft camouflage of the guns, by the building of underground galleries to house the troops instead of the more usual, give-away 'jump-off' trenches, and by dawn-to-dusk air patrols to prevent French pilots from casting spying eyes over the area.

These gargantuan preparations were, however, being directed against a military mammoth whose teeth had been drawn. By early 1916, Verdun's much-vaunted impregnability had been seriously weakened. It had been 'declassed' as a fortress the previous summer and all but a few of its guns and garrison had been removed. This was primarily the work of General Joseph J. C. Joffre, C-in-C of the French Army, who, with others, had presumed from the relatively easy fall in 1914 of the Belgian fortresses at Liège and Namur that this form of defense was redundant so far as modern warfare was concerned. Between August and October 1915, therefore, Verdun was denuded of over 50 complete batteries of guns and 128,000 rounds of ammunition. These were parcelled out to other Allied sectors where artillery was short. The stripping process was still going on at the end of January 1916, by which time the 60-odd Verdun forts possessed fewer than 300 guns with insufficient ammunition.

The result was that on the eve of the German offensive, the French defenses at Verdun were perilously weak, from the trench-works, dugouts and MG posts to the communications network and barbed-wire fences. Far-sighted men who protested at the headlong disarmament of Verdun did so in vain. One of them, General Coutanceau, was sacked as Governor of Verdun and replaced in the autumn of 1915 by the ageing and apparently more tractable General Herr. Another, Colonel Emile Driant, commander of 56th and 59th *Chasseur* Battalions of 72nd Division, 30th Corps, warned as early as 22 August 1915: 'The sledge-hammer blow will be delivered on the line Verdun-Nancy'. After his opinion reached the ears of Joffre, Driant was sharply reprimanded in December for arousing baseless fears. Gen. Herr quickly realized that Coutanceau's alarm had been perfectly justified, and that he was in dire need of reinforcements to prepare the defense line Joffre had ordered at Verdun. But Herr's pleadings did little to penetrate the cloud of smugness that swirled about the question of defending Verdun. This mood remained impervious for some weeks, despite information from German deserters about troop movements and cancelled leave and other glimpses at the dire truth.

The very last moment had almost arrived before a glimmer of sense started to seep through. On 24 January General Nöel de Castelnau, Joffre's Chief of Staff, ordered a rush completion of the first and second trench lines on the right bank of the Meuse, and a new line in between.

On 12 February, two new divisions arrived at Verdun—

much to Herr's heartfelt relief—to bring French strength up to 34 battalions against 72 German. Had the German attack begun on 12 February as planned, it would doubtless have smashed through the weak French defenses to score a stunning steamroller victory.

As it was, 12 February was not a day of savage battle, but of snow-blizzards and dense mist which afforded less than 1,100 yards visibility. The Verdun area was said to 'enjoy' some of France's filthiest weather. For a week it lived up to its reputation with snow, more snow, rain-squalls and gales.

Not until 21 February—just before 0715—did a massive shell, almost as high as a man, burst from one of the two German 15in (380mm) naval guns and roar over the 20 miles that separated its camouflaged position from Verdun. There, it exploded in the courtyard of the Bishop's Palace. At this signal, a murderous artillery bombardment erupted from the German lines and a tornado of fire—including poison gas shells—began to flay the French positions along a six-mile front. The earth convulsed and the air filled with flames, fumes and a holocaust of shrapnel and steel which, the Germans clearly hoped, would destroy every living thing within range. The bombardment hammered on and on until about 1200, when it paused so that German observers could see where—if anywhere—pockets of French defenders survived. Then the artillery began afresh, smashing trenches, shelters, barbed wire, trees and men until the whole area from Malancourt to Eparges had become a corpse-littered desert.

Falkenhayn's excessive caution

Between 1500 and 1600, the barrage intensified as a prelude to the first German infantry advance along a 4½ mile front from Bois d'Hautmont to Herbebois. The advance began at 1645 when small patrol groups came out over the 656 to 1,203 yards of No Man's Land in waves 87½ yards apart. Their purpose was to discover where French resistance might still exist and to pinpoint it to the artillery—which would then finish off the surviving defenders. This tentative approach, the result of Falkenhayn's excessive caution, was not to the taste of the belligerent General von Zwehl, commander of 7 Reserve Corps of Westphalians. Von Zwehl, whose position lay opposite Bois d'Hautmont, paid brief lip-service to Falkenhayn's orders by sending out probing patrols first, but only a short while elapsed before he ordered his fighting stormtroopers to follow them. The Westphalians surged into the Bois d'Hautmont, overran the first line of French trenches and within five hours had seized the whole wood.

To the right of the Bois d'Hautmont lay the equally devastated Bois des Caures. Here, 80,000 shells had fallen within one 500,000-square-yard area. In this shattered wasteland, the advance patrols of the German 18 Corps expected to find nothing but mounds of shattered bodies in the mud. Instead, they were faced with a fierce challenge from Colonel Driant's *Chasseurs*. Of the original 1,200 men under Driant's command, fewer than half had survived the artillery bombardment. Now, these survivors poured MG and rifle fire at the infiltrating Germans from the concrete redoubts and small strongholds which Driant had cunningly scattered through the tress.

Similarly ferocious isolated resistance was occurring all along the front, causing the Germans more delay and more casualties—600 by midnight—than they had reckoned possible. By nightfall on 21 February, the only hole decisively punched in the French line was in the Bois



d'Haumont, where Gen. Zwehl's Westphalians were now solidly entrenched. Elsewhere, the Germans had captured most of the French forward trenches, but were held up when darkness put an end to the first day's fighting which had yielded only 3,000 prisoners.

On the next two days, the Germans attacked with far greater force and much more initiative. On 22 February they blasted the village of Haumont, on the edge of the wood, with shellfire and flushed out the remaining French defenders with bombs and flamethrowers. That same day, the Bois de Ville was overwhelmed and in the Bois des Caures, which the Germans enveloped on both sides, Col. Driant ordered his *Chasseurs* to withdraw to Beaumont, about half a mile behind the wood. Only 118 *Chasseurs* managed to escape. Driant was not among them. On 23 February, the Germans saturated Samogneux with a hail of gunfire, captured Waville and Herbebois, and outflanked the village of Brabant, which the French evacuated. Next day—24 February—despite their inch-by-inch resistance, the pace of disaster accelerated for the French with 10,000 taken prisoner, the final fall of their first defense line and the collapse of their second position in a matter of hours.

The Germans were now in possession of Beaumont, the Bois de Fosses, the Bois des Caurieres and part of the way along La Vauche ravine which led to Douaumont.

Incredibly enough, at first the magnitude of the disaster did not sink in at Joffre's HQ at Chantilly, where the Staff had persuaded themselves that the German attack was a mere diversion. 'Papa' Joffre, who had long believed a serious German offensive was more likely in the Oise valley, Rheims or Champagne, maintained his customary imperturbability to such an extent that at 2300 on 24 February, he was fast asleep when General de Castelnau came hammering on his bedroom door bearing bad news from the front. Armed with 'full powers' from Joffre, who then went calmly back to bed, de Castelnau raced overnight to Verdun.

At about the time he arrived there, early on 25 February, a 10-man patrol of 24th Brandenburg Regiment of 3 Corps walked into Fort Douaumont and took possession of it and its three guns while the French garrison of 56 reserve artillerymen slept. This farcical episode, which German



1 The entrance to Fort de Vaux after three weeks of bombardment on 11 March. The fort fell on 7 June; its 600-strong garrison put up an epic six-day defense.

2 These Germans are at least dry; their official history described the conditions after 12 days of April rain: 'Water in the trenches came above the knees. The men had not a dry thread on their bodies; there was not a dug-out that could provide dry accommodation.'

3 Germans help a wounded Frenchman.

4 In the trenches near Limey, French infantrymen prepare to fire a 3in compressed air trench mortar.

propaganda exaggerated into a hard-fought victory, shocked the French into melancholic despair and realization of the true state of affairs. At Chantilly, many officers openly advocated abandoning Verdun.

There, de Castelnau drew the conclusion that the French right flank should be drawn back and that the line of forts must be held at all costs. Above all, the French must retain the right bank of the Meuse, where de Castelnau felt that a decisive defense could—and must—be anchored on the ridges. The hapless Gen. Herr was replaced forthwith by 60-year-old General Henri Philippe Pétain. De Castelnau cannibalized Pétain's Second Army with the Third Army to form for him a new Second Army.

Pétain took over responsibility for the defense of Verdun at 2400 on 25 February, after arriving that afternoon to find Herr's HQ at Dugny, south of Verdun, in a chaos of panic and recrimination. Pétain, however, judged the situation to be far less hopeless than it seemed, even though the loss of Fort Douaumont and its unparalleled observation point was a serious blow. He decided that the surviving Verdun forts should be strongly re-garrisoned to form the principal bulwarks of a new defense. Pétain mapped out new lines of resistance on both banks of the Meuse and gave orders for a barrage position to be established through Avocourt, Fort de Marre, Verdun's NE outskirts and Fort du Rozellier. The line Bras-Douaumont was divided into four sectors—the Woëvre, Woëvre-Douaumont, astride the Meuse, and the left bank of the Meuse. Each sector was entrusted to fresh troops of the 20th ('Iron') Corps. Their main job was to delay the German advance with constant counter-attacks.

Pétain saw to it that the four commands were supplied with fresh artillery as it arrived along the Bar-le-Duc road—which was soon rechristened 'Sacred Way'. Three thousand Territorials labored unceasingly to keep its unmetalled surface in constant repair so that it could stand up to punishingly heavy use by convoys of lorries—6,000 of them in a single day. Along *La Voie Sacrée* came badly needed reinforcements to replace the 25,000 men the French had lost by 26 February—five fresh Corps of them by 29 February. Already, Pétain was topping up his stock of artillery from the 388 field guns and 244 heavy guns that



Documentation Française

were at Verdun on 21 February towards the peak it reached a few weeks later of 1,100 field guns, 225 80-105mm guns and 590 heavy guns. He also set the 59th Division to work building new defensive positions.

His injection of new strategy, new blood, new supplies and new hope into the Verdun defense soon began to disconcert the Germans. In any case, their impetus was gradually grinding down. On 29 February, their advance came to an exhausted halt after the last of their initial energy had been expended in three days of violent attacks against Douaumont, Hardaumont and Bois de la Caillette.

At that juncture, apart from their own mood of 'grievous pessimism', the most damaging factor for the Germans was the French artillery sited on the left bank of the Meuse. Here, more and more Germans came under fire the farther along the right bank they advanced. The solution was obvious, as Pétain had long feared and Crown Prince Wilhelm and Gen. von Knobelsdorf had long urged. On 6 March, after a blistering two-day artillery barrage, the German 6 Reserve and 10 Reserve Corps, partly pushed across the flooded Meuse and in a swirling snowstorm, attacked along the left bank. A parallel prong of this new onslaught was planned to strike along the right bank towards Fort Vaux, whose gunners had been savaging the German left flank.

The importance of Mort Homme

Despite a plastering from French artillery in the Bois Bourrus, the Germans sped along the left bank and swept through the villages of Forges and Regneville—ending by nightfall in possession of Height 265 on the Côte de l'Oie. This ridge was of crucial importance, since it led through the adjacent Bois des Corbeaux towards the long mound known as Mort Homme. Mort Homme possessed double peaks and offered two advantages to the Germans. First it sheltered a particularly active battery of French field guns, and secondly, from its heights there stretched a magnificent all-round vista of the surrounding countryside. This gave whoever possessed it a prize observation point.

But Mort Homme soon lived up to its grisly name. After storming the Bois des Corbeaux on 7 March and losing it to a determined French counter-attack next day, the Germans prepared another attempt on Mort Homme on 9 March—this time from the direction of Béthincourt in the NW. They seized the Bois des Corbeaux a second time, but at such a crippling cost that they could not continue.

Results were depressingly similar on the right bank of the Meuse, where the German effort faded out beneath the walls of Fort Vaux. Difficulties of ammunition supply had made the attack there limp two days behind the left bank assault. With that, the 'parallel' effect of the German offensive was ruined.

Inexorably, perhaps inevitably, the fighting around Verdun was acquiring that quality of slog and slaughter, and of lives thrown away for petty, short-lived gains that was so familiar a characteristic of fighting in World War I.

Both Pétain and, in his own way, von Falkenhayn, were devotees of attrition by gunpower rather than manpower, but between March and May, the struggle at Verdun, like some Frankenstein's monster renouncing its master, assumed a will of its own and reversed this preference. German casualties mounted from 81,607 at the end of March to 120,000 by the end of April, and the French from 89,000 to 133,000, as the two sides battered each other for possession of Mort Homme. By the end of May, when the Germans had at last taken this vital position, their losses had

overtaken their enemy's. On the right bank of the Meuse, in the same three months, the fighting swung to and fro over the 'Deadly Quadrilateral'—an area south of Fort Douaumont—to the tune of maniacal, endless artillery barrages, never resolving itself decisively in favor of one side or the other.

The process greatly weakened both contestants. Mutinous behaviour and defeatist gossip became more common in the French ranks and French officers tacitly condoned this mood. More and more Germans, many of them terrified, clumsy 18-year-old boys were becoming sickly from exhaustion, the din of the guns and the filth in which they were forced to live.

Ennervation and dismay affected the heads as well as the bodies of the two opposing war efforts. By 21 April, Crown Prince Wilhelm had made up his mind that the whole Verdun campaign was a bloody failure and ought to be terminated. 'A decisive success at Verdun could only be assured at the price of heavy sacrifices, out of all proportion to the desired gains . . .' he wrote. These sentiments were echoed by Gen. Pétain, who was being nagged by Joffre to mount an aggressive counter-offensive. Pétain balked at the increase in human sacrifice which that implied and clung to the principle of patient, stolid defense. Pétain was in a difficult position. Verdun had already become a national symbol of implacable resistance to the Germans, and Pétain himself a national idol. On the other hand, Verdun was threatening to gobble up the whole French Army and it certainly presented a serious drain on the manpower being reserved by Joffre for the coming Anglo-French offensive on the Somme.

For both sides at Verdun, these falterings at the top opened the way for men more ruthlessly determined to escalate the fighting onto even more brutal levels. On 19 April, Pétain was made Commander of Army Group Center, a position which placed him in a remote rather than direct control of operations. His place as commander of Second Army was taken by General Robert Georges Nivelle, whose freebooter style of warfare had caught Joffre's attention during his series of audacious, if expensive, attacks along the right bank of the Meuse. Nivelle took over on 1 May, and arrived at headquarters at Souilly with the brash announcement: 'We have the formula!' He was also responsible for a quotation attributed sometimes to Pétain: *'Ils ne passeront pas!'*

Hurricane of deadly gunfire

Nivelle's formula displayed itself in all its gory wastefulness on 22/23 May, when General Charles Mangin staged a flamboyant attack on Fort Douaumont. After a five-day bombardment, which barely chipped the fort's defenses, Mangin's troops streamed out of their jump-off trenches straight into a hurricane of deadly German gunfire. Within minutes, the French 129th Regiment had only 45 men left. One battalion had vanished. The remnants of the 129th charged the fort and set up an MG post in one casemate against which the defending Germans flung themselves in a matching mood of suicidal madness. Out of 160 *Jägers*, *Leibgrenadiers* and men of the German 20th Regiment who attempted to overcome the French nest, only 50 returned to the fort alive. By the evening of 22 May, Fort Douaumont was in French hands, but the Germans staged violent counter-attacks, capping their onslaught with eight massive doses of explosive lobbed from a mine-thrower 80 yards distant. One thousand French were taken prisoner, and only a pathetic scattering of their comrades managed to stagger

away from the fort.

This bloody fiasco ripped a 500-yard gap in the French lines and greatly weakened their strength on the right bank of the Meuse. Together with the fact that German possession of Mort Homme largely nullified French firepower on the Bois Borrus ridge, the self-destructive strife at Fort Douaumont gave great encouragement to the so-called 'May Cup' offensive which the Germans planned for early June.

The inspiration behind 'May Cup' was Gen. von Knobelsdorf, who had temporarily eclipsed Crown Prince Wilhelm. As Nivelle's new opposite number, von Knobelsdorf soon displayed an equally implacable resolve to overcome the enemy by brute force. 'May Cup' comprised a powerful thrust on the right bank of the Meuse by five divisions on under half the 21 February attack frontage. Its purpose was to lift Verdun's last veil—Fort Vaux, Thiaumont, the Fleury ridge and Fort Souville.

On 1 June, the Germans crossed the Vaux ravine and after a frenzied contest forced Major Sylvain Raynal—commander of Fort Vaux—to surrender on 7 June. By 8 June, Gen. Nivelle had mounted six unsuccessful relief attempts, at appalling cost. He was stopped from making a seventh attempt only when Pétain expressly forbade it. Elsewhere—notably round the Ouvrage de Thiaumont—the fighting brought both sides terrible losses. The French alone were losing 4,000 men per division in a single action. By 12 June, Nivelle's fresh reserves amounted to only one brigade—not more than 2,000 men.

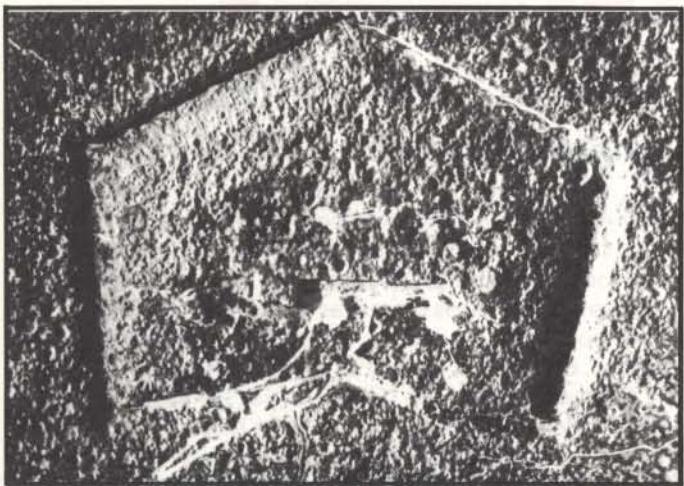
Imminent disaster—then salvation

With the Germans now poised to take Fort Souville—the very last major fortress protecting Verdun—ultimate disaster seemed imminent for the French. Eleventh-hour salvation came in the form of two Allied offensives in other theaters of war. On 4 June, on the Eastern Front, the Russian General Alexei A. Brusilov threw 40 divisions at the Austrian line in Galicia, in a surprise attack that flattened its defenders. The Russians took 400,000 prisoners. To shore up his war effort, now threatened with total collapse, Field Marshal Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Austrian C-in-C, begged Falkenhayn to send in German reinforcements. Grudgingly, Falkenhayn detached three divisions from the Western Front. Meanwhile, the French had been doing some pleading on their own account. In May and June, Joffre, de Castelnau, Pétain and French Prime Minister Aristide Briand had all begged General Sir Douglas Haig, the British C-in-C, to advance the Somme offensive from its projected starting date of mid-August. Haig at last complied on 24 June, and that day the week-long preliminary bombardment began.

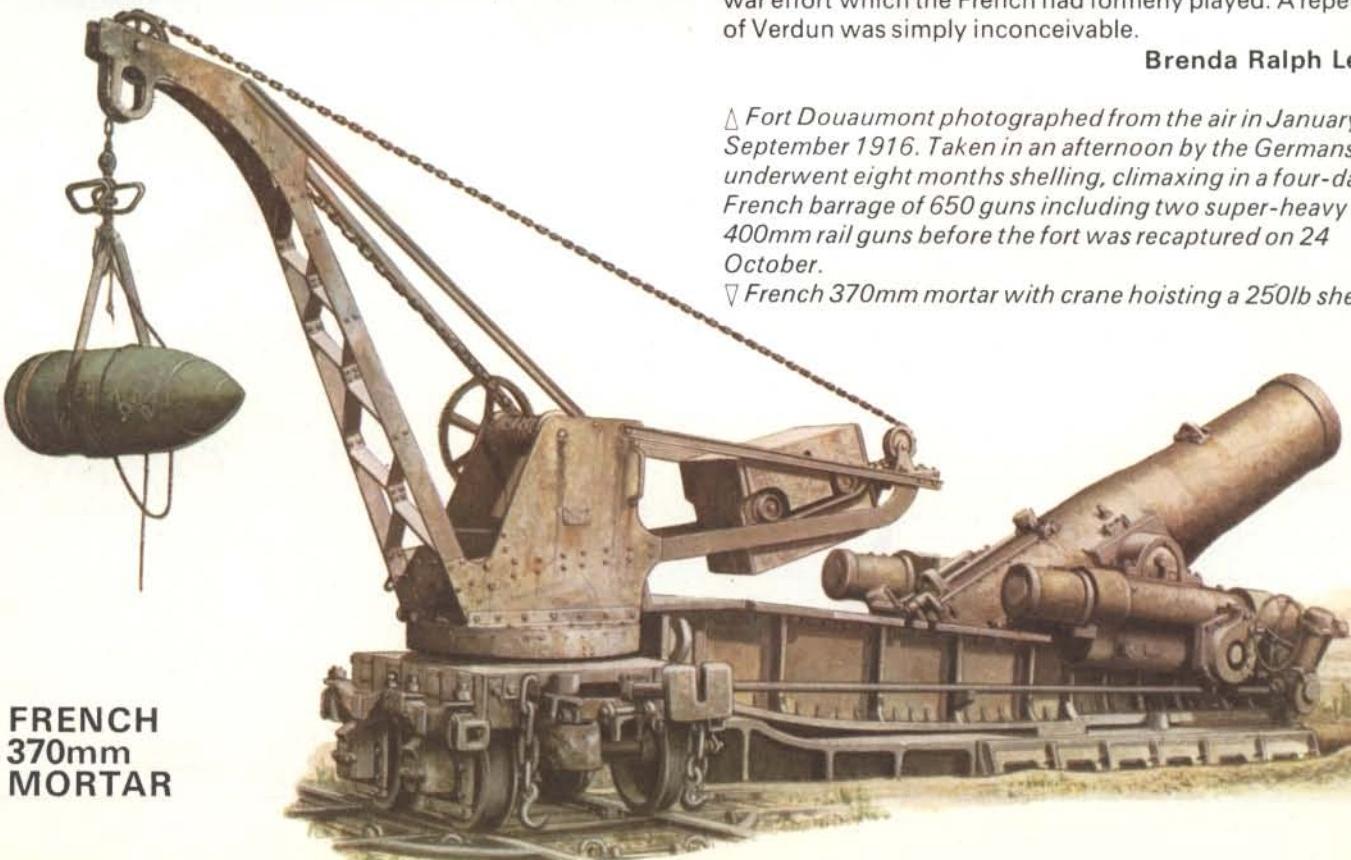
At this juncture, a German 30,000-man assault on Fort Souville, which had begun with phosgene—'Green Cross'—gas attacks on 22 June had already crumpled. Despite its horrifying effects on everything that lived and breathed, the novel phosgene barrage was neither intense nor prolonged enough to sufficiently paralyze the power of the French artillery. This shortfall, together with German failure to attack on a wide enough front, their recent loss of air superiority to the French, their shrinking store of manpower and the ravages thirst was wreaking in their lines, combined to scuttle the German push against Fort Souville on 22 June. July and August saw increasingly puny attempts by the Germans to snatch the prize that had come so tantalizingly close but all ended in failure and exhaustion. German morale was at its lowest. On 3 September, the German offen-



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FRENCH
370mm
MORTAR

sive finally faded in a weak paroxysm of effort. Verdun proper came to an end.

For the Germans, this miserable curtain-fall on the drama of Verdun was assisted by the fact that after 24 June, the exigencies of the fighting elsewhere denied them new supplies of ammunition and, after 1 July, men.

All that remained was for the French to re-arm, reinforce their troops and counter-attack to regain what they had lost. By 24 August 1917, after a brilliant series of campaigns masterminded by Pétain, Nivelle and Mangin, the only mark on the map to show the Germans had ever occupied anything in the area of Verdun denoted the village of Beaumont.

During this counter-offensive, the formerly maligned forts reinstated themselves as powerful weapons of defense. As the French re-captured them, they found how relatively little they had suffered from the massive artillery pounding they had received. This discovery made forts fashionable among French military strategists once more. It did so most notably, and later mortally for France, in the mind of André Maginot, Minister for War from November 1929 to January 1931 and in that time sponsor of the Maginot Line of fortifications.

Of course, fortress-like durability was given neither to the 66 French and $43\frac{1}{2}$ German divisions which fought at Verdun between February and June 1916, nor to the terrain they so bitterly disputed for so long. Both suffered permanent scars. The land around Verdun, raked over again and again by saturation shelling—over 12 million rounds from the French artillery alone—became a ravaged, infertile lunar-like wasteland. By 1917, the soil of Verdun was thickly sown with dead flesh and irrigated by spilled blood, having claimed more than $1\frac{1}{4}$ million casualties. Between February and December 1916, the French had lost 377,231 men and the Germans about 337,000 in a scything down of their ranks. In these circumstances, the Western Front ceased to be a sideshow for the British—if it had ever been so. They were forced to assume the star role in the Allied war effort which the French had formerly played. A repetition of Verdun was simply inconceivable.

Brenda Ralph Lewis

△ *Fort Douaumont photographed from the air in January and September 1916. Taken in an afternoon by the Germans, it underwent eight months shelling, climaxing in a four-day French barrage of 650 guns including two super-heavy 400mm rail guns before the fort was recaptured on 24 October.*

▽ *French 370mm mortar with crane hoisting a 250lb shell.*



CRETE INVASION

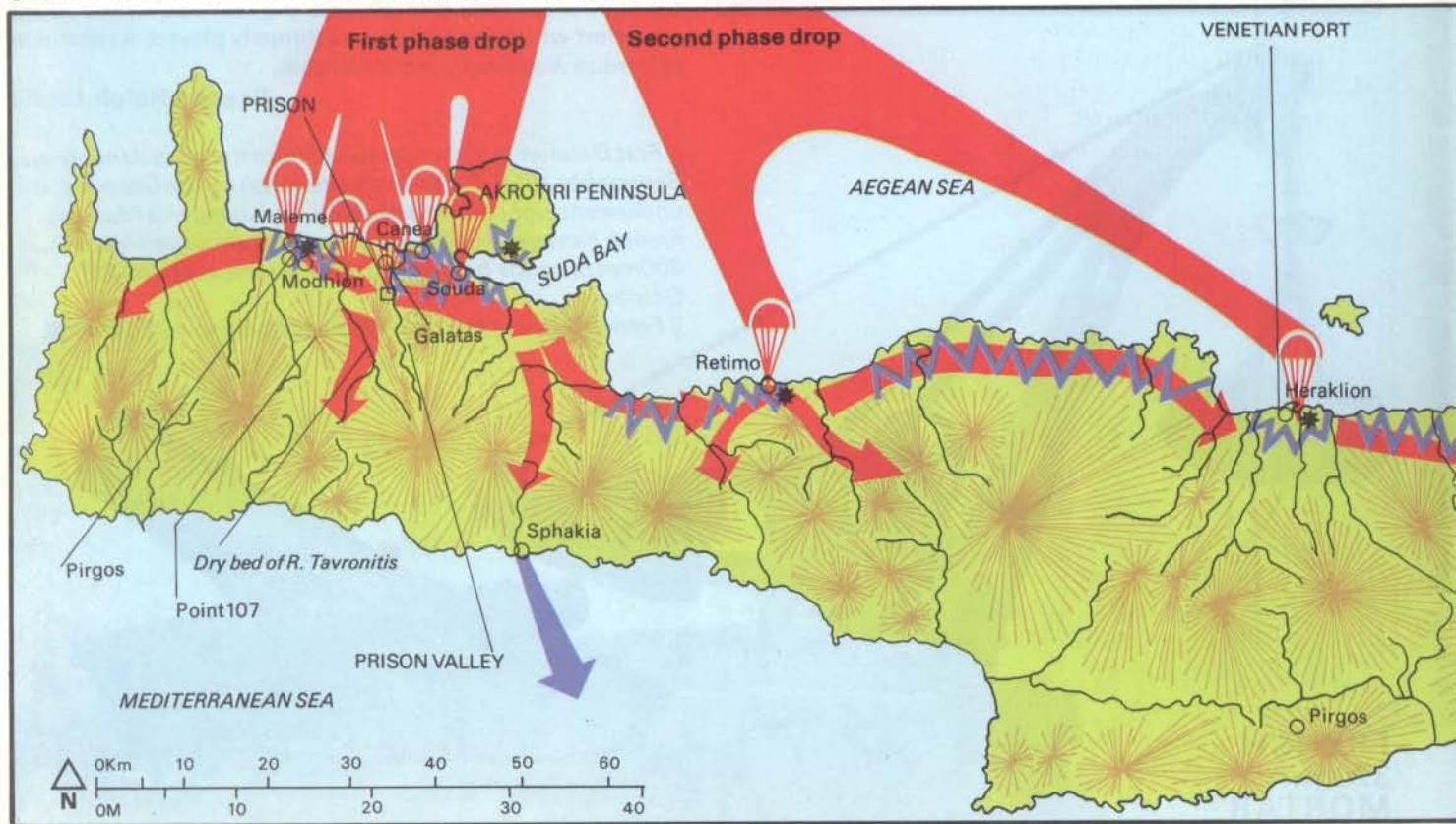
Mediterranean island chosen for a unique military experiment—the first massed paratroop drop

Dust and smoke blotted out the sun. Men who had been sheltering from the bombing crawled from their shallow trenches and brushed the dirt from their equipment and weapons. They did not hear the next attack until it was on top of them. The enemy came silently, from the sky, in gliders.

This was the first wave of Operation *Merkur* (Mercury)—a unique military experiment. The reluctant witnesses were the dust-blinded men of the British and Commonwealth garrison of Crete. It was the morning of 20 May 1941 and

8,060 German paratroopers were set to capture an island 160 miles long and 40 miles broad, held by 42,500 British, Commonwealth and Greek troops.

The battle of Crete is unique as the first massed operational paratroop drop in the history of warfare. It has other unusual features. Both sides started with virtually equal resources. The Germans controlled the air, while the British Mediterranean Fleet held the seas. Each side was lightly armed by World War II standards and neither believed there was any





GERMAN DFS 230B-1 GLIDER IN TOW BY JU 52

Peter Sarson/Tony Bryan

possibility of retreat from the island. It was a battle 'lost by kindness' by the British and won by bluff and drive by the Germans. But it could easily have been their first major land defeat of the war—20 months before Stalingrad. What brought these airborne invaders to Crete?

In October 1940 Mussolini had invaded Greece from Albania. His heroic 'Führer we are on the march' preceded a disastrous operation which gave Britain a chance to gain a foothold in Europe after the fall of France. When Hitler began to complete his plans for the attack on Russia (Operation Barbarossa) he realized that he must secure his right flank either by alliances or military action. His major fear was that the Rumanian oil wells at Ploesti would be within range of bombers based either in Greece or on the Greek islands.

△ The two vehicles of airborne conquest—a Junkers 52

tri-motor transport towing a DFS 230B-1 glider. The

493 Ju 52s and 72 gliders involved were part of

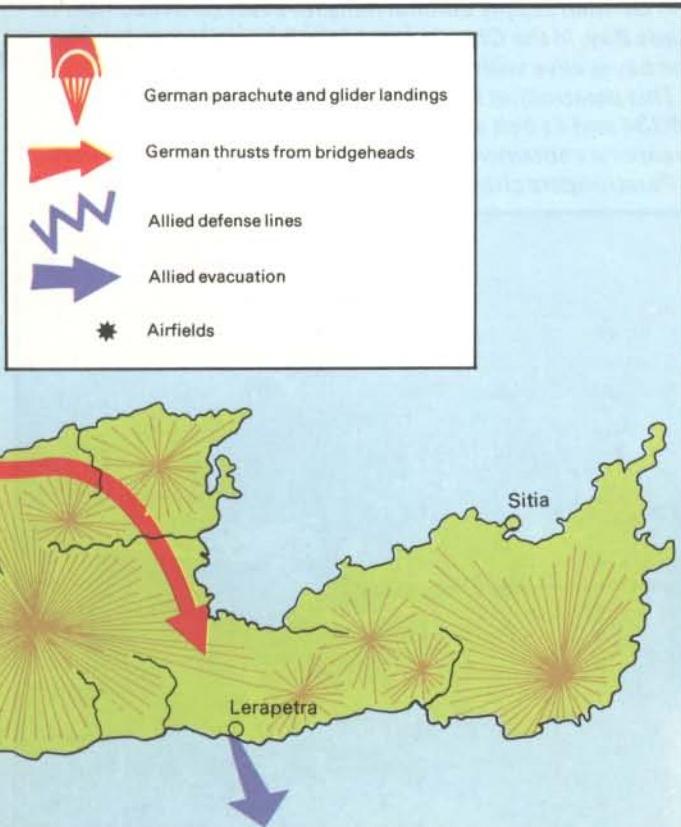
Luftflotte 4 and were organised into 10 transport groups.

▽ A paratrooper watches follow-up 'sticks'.

▷ Prompt follow-up. Mountain troops of 5th Division board their Ju 52s on the afternoon of 21 May to land directly on Meleme airfield, the first and main German objective of their triple assault on Crete (see map below).



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Germany intervened in the Greek campaign (see 'War Monthly' issue 20, 'Thermopylae 1941'). By the beginning of May 1941 she held all of the Greek mainland. All that remained was Crete.

On 20 April 1941, Lieutenant General Kurt Student of the *Luftwaffe* visited *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Goering and submitted the plans for an airborne attack on Crete. The paratroops of 7th Air Division were a *Luftwaffe* command and Goering saw this attack as a chance to bolster *Luftwaffe* prestige after the unsatisfactory series of air raids during the period known as the Battle of Britain.

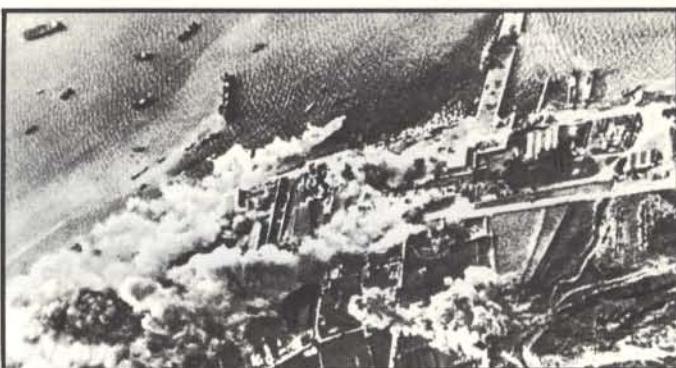
Before Mercury small numbers of paratroops had been used in Norway, Holland, Belgium and Greece. They were regarded both by the Allies and the Germans as an elite, futuristic and slightly sinister branch of the armed forces. In 1940 there were rumors of men jumping dressed as nuns, postmen and even as Dutch soldiers. Even without disguises the paratrooper's uniform with its zipped pockets, rubber soled boots, rimless helmet and a smock which was almost like a set of short-legged coveralls, made the jack boots and serge tunics of the infantry look medieval.

Rugged 'Auntie Annie'

Air transport was a tri-motored Ju 52. This carried 12 men and four containers, and was known affectionately as 'Auntie Annie' or '*Judula*'. It was a rugged aircraft with a maximum range of 800 miles and a speed of 182mph at 3,250ft. Glider troops travelled in the DFS230 which carried 10 men in a canvas-covered tubular steel fuselage. In 1941 the Germans still used 'Direct Attack' tactics which they had employed in Holland and Belgium. This involved dropping directly onto the target, be it a bridge, airfield or, as at Eben Emael, a fort. Preceded by bombing this method meant that the enemy could be overwhelmed while they were still under cover, but if they had time to react it could become a very expensive tactic. The British and American tactic was to drop on a secure Dropping Zone (DZ), form up, and then move off to the target. Crete and Arnhem showed the weakness of both methods.

On 19 May 1941 the 7th Air Division had an intelligence summary which gave reasonably accurate details of the garrison on Crete as it stood in December 1940: '5,000 men (one brigade) of which 400 are at Heraklion and the rest (2nd Black Watch and 2nd York and Lancasters, in and around Canea. War material includes 30 tanks, 30 AA guns, 40 AA machine-guns, two heavy coastal guns and 300 vehicles of all kinds'. But attempts to up-date this summary were misleading. Air reconnaissance reported that 'the island appeared lifeless' and the *Luftwaffe* began to think that Mercury could be a quick, cheap way of bleeding its paratroops.

The garrison, in fact, consisted of 28,000 British and ANZACS with Greek battalions and Cretan irregulars—a total strength of 42,500. Many of the men from the 6th Australian and 2nd New Zealand Divisions were veterans of the Greek campaign who had been evacuated to the island. They had left behind most of their weapons and equipment in Greece. For shovels helmets were pressed into service, and rations and utensils were bought or borrowed from the Cretans—or just 'found'. The 22 tanks were refurbished wrecks from Egypt. The guns were captured Italian pieces whose enterprising crews had built sights out of chewing gum and matchsticks. Though there were telephones, there were few reliable radios and messages were often delivered by runner or dispatch rider. Worse still, in six months Crete



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had six different commanders. When the seventh arrived he had only three weeks in which to familiarize himself. The new commander—Major-General Bernard C. Freyberg, VC—found that battalions had been placed to cover the airfields at Maleme, Retimo and Heraklion, the island's capital Canea and the important harbor and docks at Suda Bay. The Germans were expected to attempt an airborne landing, but it was thought they would send a large number of men by sea as well. Moreover there was a prevalent idea that the Germans did not regard airfields as vital for air landing operations and that Ju 52s could come down on any flat land. As a result, the garrison was spread across the flat coastal plain covering a variety of potential landing areas.

The plan which Student outlined to Goering did include an amphibious phase, but the main weight of the attack would be airborne. Due to a shortage of aircraft it was divided into two air assaults. A morning lift would put down about 3,000 men by glider and parachute in the Maleme, Canea, Suda Bay area. They would be under Major General Eugene Meindl's command. In the afternoon the second

1 Stukaangriff! Ju 87 bombing of the Suda Bay docks area began three weeks before the airborne invasion of Crete.

2 A German supply column halts for a rest on a road next to Suda Bay, in the Chania area of the island. As can be seen, the bay is alive with shipping.

3 This paratrooper is lucky to have retrieved both his MG34 and its belt ammo boxes. In many cases heavy weapons containers became separated from their owners.

4 Paratroopers charge into action, 28 May.



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U.S. National Archives

lift would drop at Retimo and Heraklion. Colonel Alfred Sturm would lead 1,500 men at Retimo and Colonel Bruno Brauer 2,600 at Heraklion.

Brauer's landing would be followed by Lieutenant General Julius Ringel's 5th Mountain Division minus one regiment which would come by sea. Other amphibious landings would be made by two battalions of mountain troops with their heavy vehicles and support weapons as well as engineer and AT units of the parachute forces. They would travel in Greek fishing boats escorted by the Italian Navy. Student planned an 'oil spot' attack. Men would land on several dropping zones, consolidate them, and then link up like blobs of oil spreading to form a pool.

The Germans labored with their usual energy to prepare for Mercury. Weapons containers had to be sent from France, where they had been stored in preparation for the invasion of Britain. Men came from their depots in Germany. Fuel, 650,000 gallons of it, had to be shipped in for the 493 planes involved. But by 17 May no fuel had arrived. The tanker due from Italy was stuck in the Corinth Canal, trapped by the remains of a demolished bridge. Divers were flown from Kiel and the canal was cleared. But there was more trouble on the airfields. The fuel had to be transferred to 45-gallon barrels and then hand-pumped into the aircraft. Though the Germans conscripted Greeks to repair the airfields, they could not prevent the dirt strips being churned into dust. By the time the second wave took off on 20 May, this dust had been blown to a height of 500ft above the airfields. On 19 May Captain Freiherr Friedrich August von der Heyde, a company commander in 3rd Parachute

Regiment, attended Student's briefing, given, as usual, in the luxury of the Athens Hotel Grand Bretagne: 'It was his own personal plan. He had devised it, had struggled against heavy opposition for its acceptance and had worked out all the details. One could perceive that his plan had become a part of him, a part of his life. He believed in it and lived for it and in it'. The afternoon of the 19 May was taken up with briefings, distribution of maps and orders, drawing ammunition and checking kit. The quartermasters produced beer and brandy 'and the bottles did not long remain full'.

Just before take off von der Heyde was faced with a peculiar personal problem. Max Schmeling, the champion boxer, reported to von der Heyde. He was suffering from acute diarrhoea but feared that if he went sick he would be labelled a coward. Von der Heyde gave some practical, if brutal advice. He was to button up the legs of his smock and 'report sick, my dear fellow, when we get to Crete. Our medical staff is flying with us.'

It was a chilly morning on Crete on 20 May. The *Luftwaffe* arrived about 0700 with their 'morning hate'. Thirty minutes later there were new attacks. This time it seemed to the men at Canea and Suda that a continuous stream of planes was above them. At Maleme the airfield was attacked by Ju 88s and then Ju 87s (Stukas) and ground-strafing Me 109s. The Bofors guns on the airstrip fought their last battle until only one remained: 'This went on firing some time till a host of Stukas and Me 108s (*sic!*) fastened on it and shot and blasted it out of existence'.

At 0800 the attack ended and an 'eerie, acrid and ominous' silence followed. The gliders which came



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swooping down through the dust and smoke carried men of the 1st Battalion of the Assault Regiment. Their job at Maleme was to neutralize the AA guns and take a hill known as Point 107, which dominated the airfield. Some landed at the foot of Point 107 and others in the dried-up river-bed of the Tavronitis.

Elsewhere gliders landed in a valley near Canea known as 'Prison Valley' (it contained the island's only jail) and on the heavy AA guns on the Akrotiri Peninsula. For many of the men inside, this was their last journey, ending in a bullet-shredded fuselage crumpled against a rocky hillside. The landing zones near Prison Valley that the Germans had selected from aerial photographs had been interpreted as a plateau. In fact, they were far from even and strewn with boulders.

Before the last glider had bounced to a halt the paratroopers began to jump. To Lieutenant Thomas of the New Zealand 23rd Battalion they seemed: '... unreal, difficult to comprehend as anything dangerous. Seen against the deep blue of the early morning Cretan sky, through a frame of grey-green olive branches, they looked like little jerking dolls whose billowy frocks of grey, yellow, red and white had somehow blown up and become entangled in the wires that controlled them.' But the men on the ground soon realized that these were malevolent dolls which were at a dangerous disadvantage in the air. Caught under fire in mid-air 'you'd see one go limp, then give a kick and kind of straighten up with a jerk, and then go limp again, and you knew he was done for'. Upon landing they remained vulnerable. Though some paratroopers carried MP 38 submachine-guns, many were armed only with an 08 Luger pistol.

△ British captives emerge. Nearly 12,000 were taken, more than in Greece the previous month, but the capture of Crete cost more German casualties in men and aircraft than the entire Balkans campaign. They suffered 6,000 casualties.

▽ May 1941. A German PAK 36 AT gun in position at the top of the main street in the village of Retimo. The gunner is well sited to spot any approaching enemy.



Neither weapon with its 9mm ammunition had a great range. Until they reached the brightly colored weapons containers the paratroopers could be picked off at long range by riflemen.

Among the men from 23rd Battalion who were stalking Germans there was one unusual hunting party. The 60 inmates of the Field Punishment Centre at Modhion had been rearmed and sent out against the foe. In less than an hour of freedom they killed 110 Germans. One defender did not even have to move. The Adjutant of the 23rd Battalion sat at his packing-case desk in an olive grove and shot two paratroopers as they crashed through the trees beside him.

Though most of the Germans who survived were bunched in small defensive groups there were those who had begun to join together into effective forces. Paratroopers who had dropped west of Maleme airstrip and glider troops who landed around the Tavronitis bridge had had time to assemble in the modest cover of the river bed. A large force landed in Prison Valley, but though their DZ was unmolested they were trapped there.

Reports—few and imprecise

Reports from Crete were few and imprecise. Student fell back on reconnaissance flights. But now that he was committed, he put the second phase of the operation into action. Maleme may have been bad and the landings around Canea unsatisfactory but the attacks which followed at Retimo and Heraklion proved to be even worse.

The 2nd/1st and the 2nd/11th Australian Battalions were dug in at Retimo—on the hills that overlooked the road and the temporary airstrip. On the afternoon of the 20th they reduced a force of 1,500 paratroops to 1,000 men, broken up into ineffective groups, in only one hour. The Australians held the airstrip, and those paratroops who moved off to capture the less important objective of Retimo became entangled with armed Greek gendarmerie.

Heraklion was held by force of Australian and British troops. The preliminary bombing did not have the intended effect of keeping their heads down, for some units had arrived after the last German reconnaissance flight, and so were not listed as targets. Heavy fire greeted the paratroops as they started to jump. The men of the Black Watch were close to the airfield and were therefore able to concentrate their fire on each stick as they jumped. The German timetable had gone awry. Instead of putting in a massed drop, lone Ju 52s were flying in and releasing individual sticks over the dropping zone. Captain Burckhardt of 2nd Battalion, 1st Parachute Regiment, said that the discovery that the enemy had tanks and Bren carriers came as a complete surprise. Moreover, the Black Watch soon grasped the importance of the weapons cannisters and shot the paratroopers before they could get to their heavy weapons. Burckhardt wrote: 'I had never expected such bitter fighting and we began to despair of ever gaining our objective or indeed of surviving at all'.

The men who dropped to the west of Heraklion made their way towards the town and though the commander of the Greek battalion seemed willing to surrender, the paratroopers found themselves caught in heavy fighting with the 2nd/4th Australians, the 2nd Leicesters and 2nd York and Lancasters. With Greek help, the Anglo-Australian forces pushed some of the paratroopers out of the town and bottled up others in the Venetian fort down by the docks.

By the afternoon of 20 May Student was in radio contact with the men in Prison Valley and at Maleme where a

damaged transmitter had at last been repaired. He learned that Maj. Gen. Meindl had been wounded at Maleme, where heavy fighting continued, and that in Prison Valley the men were trapped and had ceased attempts to break out towards Canea. It was night by the time he heard of the failure of the Heraklion attack. From Retimo there was only silence.

It had been a busy but satisfactory day for the British and Commonwealth defenders on Crete. The news was transmitted by dispatch rider—an erratic and dangerous service since all roads were under constant attack by fighters. Though the British and Commonwealth officers knew that they should counter-attack while the Germans were still weak, many still believed that a major seaborne attack was in the offing and did not realize that almost all the paratroops had been committed.

The New Zealanders were still holding Point 107 and dominating Maleme airstrip on the night of 20/21 May. At 1700 Lieutenant-Colonel L. W. Andrew, VC, CO of the 22nd Battalion, put in a counter-attack against the Germans grouped around the Tavronitis Bridge. His forces were overstretched so he could only afford a platoon with two tanks. Both tanks broke down and were lost and though the attack created some confusion among the Germans it did not eject them.

Student was able to piece together a picture of the fighting through his radio link with Maleme and Prison Valley, but the New Zealand officers in the area were out of touch with even their closest neighbors. After the failure of the counter-attack Andrew received information which indicated that not only was his battalion out on a vulnerable limb—exhausted and understrength—but it would be attacked by superior German air and ground forces the next morning. His runners had not returned with orders. He decided to pull back his battalion from Point 107.

Exhausted paratroopers

The following morning the exhausted paratroopers made their way up the hill. To their surprise there was no fire. Before this news could be appreciated Captain Kleye landed on the western edge of the airstrip. He had been sent to Student to get an up-to-date assessment of the battle. His news was not encouraging, but his Ju 52 landed unmolested. By 0800 six supply aircraft had touched down on the beach west of the Tavronitis. Student now decided to reinforce success. At 0900 two parachute companies—composed of men who had missed jumping in the first lift—were dropped west of the Tavronitis. A supporting drop east of Pergos landed in the area of the New Zealand 5th Brigade and suffered heavy casualties.

With the news that the airfield was usable and Point 107 secure, Student began to commit his air landing troops. With 5th Mountain Division came Colonel Hermann Ramcke. He was to replace Meindl who had been flown out to have his wound treated. Student had some doubts about Ramcke's skills as a commander, but by the end of a week he had proved to be a tough, competent leader.

As Junkers roared in in clouds of red dust and flung out their cargo of men and equipment, Ramcke planned to 'roll up the island' working from west to east. Maleme was still under fire from the elderly Italian guns of the garrison and when damaged transport aircraft began to block the runway, Major Snowatzky collected some prisoners and a British tank and bulldozed the wrecks clear.

That night, however, the British watched with delight as searchlights and gunfire lit up the sea to the north. The

'invasion fleet' prepared by Rear Admiral Schuster had been sent across the Aegean at night, unprotected by the *Luftwaffe*. 'Force D' under Rear-Admiral I. G. C. Glennie had located it on radar and intercepted. For two and a half hours the cruisers and destroyers of 'Force D', struck in their commander's words, 'with zest and energy'. Though the British thought that they had killed a large number of Germans and Italians many were rescued. There were 309 killed. Many men escaped to neighboring islands, and another convoy had turned back before the Royal Navy made contact.

The sea battle seemed a good omen for the attack on Maleme being prepared by Freyberg. He allocated two New Zealand battalions—1,500 men—for the operation. They had a long approach march before they could reach the airfield. In the confusion of the night they bumped into the survivors of Major Scherber's 3rd Battalion and at Pirgos men of the supporting 21 May drop. These pockets held up the men of the New Zealand 21st and 23rd Battalions so that it was dawn by the time they reached Maleme. But it was too late. The skies were ruled by the *Luftwaffe*, so the attack was called off.

Student had now committed himself to Maleme and the men at Retimo and Heraklion were instructed to hang on and contain the garrison in these areas. *Luftwaffe* support was switched to the eastern edge of Maleme and the men of the 5th Mountain Division began to work up into the hills on their right to outflank the New Zealanders. The Germans planned to take Canea and open up Prison Valley to release the paratroops still trapped by the New Zealand 10th Brigade.

Key to Prison Valley

The key to Prison Valley was the little village of Galatas. The Germans wanted to capture it to help in 'rolling up the island' Freyberg knew that he must deny it them to give himself time to evacuate his men. He had realized on 24 May that now he could not hold the island and the Royal Navy had suffered heavy losses trying to support the garrison. The decision to evacuate came as a shock to men who thought that they were winning—which they were at Retimo and Heraklion.

By 25 May the Germans were close to Canea. Only fragmented Allied units and the spur of high ground topped by Galatas seemed to block the way. They turned on the village and under a rain of mortar bombs forced out its gallant defenders—the men of the New Zealand Divisional Petrol Company. But that evening it became the turn of the Germans, now flushed with victory, to fight a desperate defensive battle.

The counter-attack was made up of 'the flower of those left from the day's fighting' and pressed home against the Germans with yells and 'the most blood-curdling shouts and battle-cries. The effect was terrific. One felt one's blood rising swiftly above fear and uncertainty until only inexplicable exhilaration, quite beyond description, remained.' In savage hand-to-hand fighting the Germans were ejected from the village.

On 25 May Student had landed at Maleme and by the 27th the paratroops had captured Canea. British and New Zealand forces in the area began a painful withdrawal over the White Mountains to the tiny port of Sphakia. Commandos of Brigadier Robert E. Laycock's force had been landed, and though they were not trained for this role and lacked heavy weapons, they fought a skilled withdrawing action covering the garrison.



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Malcolm McGregor

△ An unterfeldwebel (under-sergeant) of paratroops armed with pistol, stick-grenade and 9mm 'Schmeisser' MP40 submachine-gun (his hand rests on the magazine pouches).

1 The weary victors. Col. Brauer (in cap, wearing the Iron Cross) and staff after nine days' fighting.

2 Makeshift armada. 5th Mountain Div. troops aboard a Greek caique fitted with a 37mm AA gun. Some 7,000 Germans were to invade Crete, but two convoys, deterred by the Royal Navy, turned back, so reinforcements had to come by air.

3 German Infantry on the mountain road near Almiros.

At Heraklion Brigadier B. H. Chappel received orders to evacuate and on 28 May the Royal Navy lifted all his men, less the Greeks. But at Retimo Lieutenant-Colonel Ian R. Campbell never received his orders. When a mobile column of paratroopers and mountain troops reached Retimo they found the survivors of Sturm's 2nd Parachute Regiment trapped in an olive oil factory under fire from an Australian-crewed German mountain-gun. Though many Australians were captured and 500 paratroopers liberated, about 700 Germans lay dead.

At Sphakia the men sheltered in the limestone caves along the coast, and waited. There were some naval officers who questioned the wisdom of attempting an evacuation. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet, signalled his ships: 'We cannot let them down. It takes the Navy three years to build a ship. It would take 300 years to re-build a tradition.' During the operation the Navy lost the AA cruiser *Calcutta* and the destroyers *Hereward* and *Imperial*. But the greatest loss was aboard the heavily laden cruiser *Orion*. Hit by one bomb, 260 men had lost their lives and 280 others were wounded.

Royal Navy's severe losses

By the end of May the Navy had evacuated 18,000 men. But by then its losses had become so severe that it had to cease operations—albeit reluctantly. About 5,000 men were left behind on the beaches, and though some managed to find small craft and risked the journey across the Mediterranean and others escaped into the hills, many were forced to surrender. Among these men Evelyn Waugh, then a Captain, remembers a Bren gunner dismantling his gun and throwing it, bit by bit, into the oily waters of the harbor at Sphakia.

In all the British and Commonwealth troops lost 1,742 killed and 1,737 wounded with 11,835 prisoners. The Royal Navy lost nine warships with 17 damaged and the RAF had 46 aircraft destroyed.

The Germans won the battle of Crete. But it was a costly victory. Out of a total force of 22,000 men they suffered 6,000 casualties of whom 1,990 were killed and 1,955 missing (all but 17 of these were presumed dead). Of the 493 transports employed 220 were destroyed. The losses in men included some of the best officers and NCOs. The commander of the 7th Air Division, Lieutenant General Süssmann, was killed when his glider crashed, and other men like Major Scherber, CO of the Assault Regiment's 3rd Battalion, and glider expert Lieutenant von Plessen also died during Operation Mercury.

The greatest casualty for the *Luftwaffe*, however, was Hitler's confidence. Two months after the operation he said to Student: 'The day of the parachutist is over. The Parachute arm is a surprise weapon and without the element of surprise there can be no future for airborne forces'. He had been shocked by the losses in Crete and no amount of persuasion by *Luftwaffe* officers could convince him that these could be made up.

Paratroopers were used again in small operations, but never on critical targets like Malta. Had Malta, Cyprus or the Nile Delta been attacked, using the indirect method, the war could have taken a different course. So the sacrifice of the garrison of Crete was not wasted, though the men who trudged down the winding stoney tracks to Sphakia would hardly have believed this in the last nights of May 1941.

William Fowler

WOUNDED KNEE 1890

Battle or massacre? Were the 7th Cavalry settling a debt as they slaughtered the Sioux at Wounded Knee?

In the spring of the year 1890, rumors began to circulate among the Sioux Indians confined to six barren reservations in the newly formed state of South Dakota. The Indians told one another that Jesus, who had been killed by the white man, was coming back to Earth to save the Indians from their white oppressors. A Paiute mystic named Wovoka, who had been raised by white farmers in Nevada, had seen this in a vision during an eclipse of the sun. He was preaching a message of rebirth to the hungry, sickly Indians confined to reservations all over the American West.

'Jesus was tired of the white man, and had adopted the Indian as his own people', Wovoka said. He wanted the Indians to live good Christian lives, and some time soon—probably in the spring of 1891—he would return to Earth and the power of the white man would be broken. Each tribe had their own version of how the white man would meet his doom. Among the Sioux, those who spoke of Wovoka's prophecy believed that dirt would fall from the sky and bury the white man and his railroads and towns, but that the Indians would be saved and would inherit the new earth.

'My people, before the white man came, you were happy', Wovoka said. 'You had many buffalo to eat and tall grass for your ponies. You could come and go like the wind . . .

The white man came. He dug up the bones of our mother, the earth. He tore her bosom with steel . . . He fought you and beat you, and put you in barren places where a horned toad would die . . .

'Grandfather (God) says when your friends die you must not cry. You must not hurt anyone or do harm to anyone. You must not fight. Do right always. It will give you satisfaction in life.'

'Do not tell the whites about this. Jesus is now upon the Earth. He appears like a cloud. The dead are all alive again. I do not know when they will be here. Maybe this Fall or in the spring. When the time comes there will be no more sickness and everyone will be young again. Do not refuse to work for the whites and do not make any trouble with them until you leave them. When the earth shakes at the Coming, do not be afraid. It will not hurt you.'

No people were ever more in need of a miracle than the Sioux and the other Plains Indians of 1890. The end of the wars with the white man 10 years before had brought no peace. The Sioux had signed a Treaty in 1868, guaranteeing them a huge reservation centered in SW Dakota, but the treaty had twice been broken. Each time they lost more land. Finally, in 1889, the government, through some very questionable diplomacy, claimed to have obtained enough



signatures to allot the Great Sioux Reservation into small 320-acre tracts. The Indians' huge domain was broken up into six different reservations, and the surplus land was sold to the government at \$1.25 an acre, which was held in trust.

Dictatorial agents controlled each reservation. They slavishly followed a government policy of forcing the Indians to give up their native religion, their culture, and the second and third wives that many Sioux had. The government hoped to turn the former buffalo hunters into small farmers, but attempts at agriculture failed due to lack of rainfall and barren soil. To make matters worse, Congress, now satisfied that the Indians needed no further cajolery and had parted with everything worth having, cut their promised beef ration by millions of pounds. Starvation, and the disease of malnutrition, began to plague the Sioux, who

were already humiliated by their defeats at the hands of the US Army.

'I believe I must die', a Sioux chief told one agent. 'And I think it would be better for me to die fighting with weapons in my hands than to starve to death at the agency door'.

At this point, the rumors of the New Dawn of the prophet Wovoka began to sweep the reservation. The desperate Indians grasped at the straw of a Second Coming and took up one of the features of Wovoka's religion, the ritual called the Ghost Dance. Holding hands, the Indian men and women would dance in a huge circle, singing mystical songs about the Second Coming until some of them achieved a state of trance. The entranced dancers would stagger into the center of the circle and dance until they dropped. Those who fainted awoke with stories of having seen their dead loved ones, alive and happy in the Spirit World. The Ghost Dance merged with the earlier Sioux cult of sacred visions, and the Sioux began to abandon their small farms, take their children out of the government schools, and spend all their time dancing.

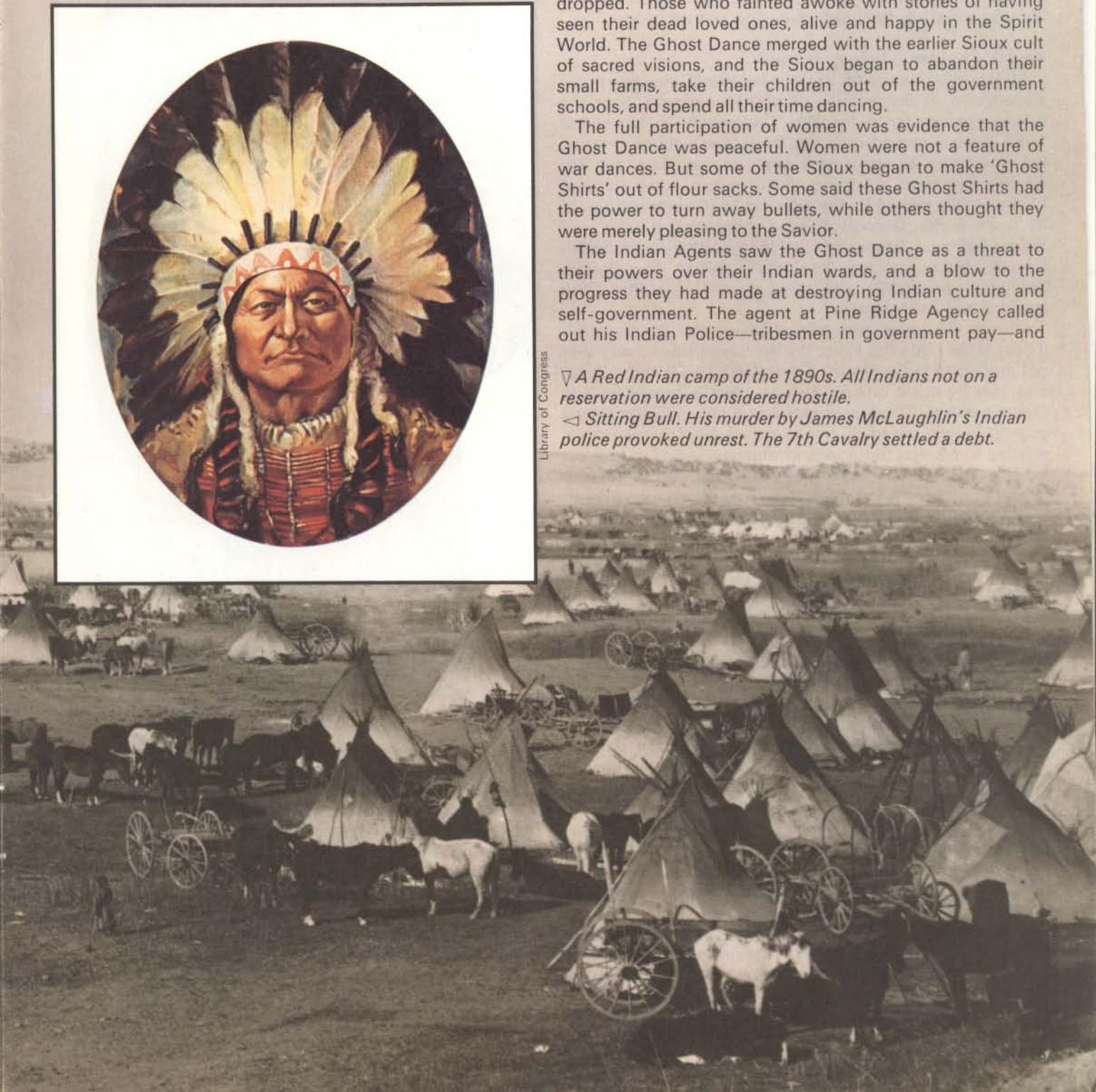
The full participation of women was evidence that the Ghost Dance was peaceful. Women were not a feature of war dances. But some of the Sioux began to make 'Ghost Shirts' out of flour sacks. Some said these Ghost Shirts had the power to turn away bullets, while others thought they were merely pleasing to the Savior.

The Indian Agents saw the Ghost Dance as a threat to their powers over their Indian wards, and a blow to the progress they had made at destroying Indian culture and self-government. The agent at Pine Ridge Agency called out his Indian Police—tribesmen in government pay—and

▼ A Red Indian camp of the 1890s. All Indians not on a reservation were considered hostile.

△ Sitting Bull. His murder by James McLaughlin's Indian police provoked unrest. The 7th Cavalry settled a debt.

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descended on a camp of Ghost Dancers at White Clay Creek in August 1890, with the intention of breaking up the proceedings. Angry Indians threatened him at gunpoint and said they would defend their religion to the death. The agent backed off as calmly as possible. A few days later, he went into near-hysterics and resigned.

Into the breach the Department of the Interior, which had authority over the Indians, thrust one Daniel F. Royer, a man described as 'destitute of any of those qualities by which he could justly lay claim to the position—experience, force of character, courage and sound judgement.' The Indians took Royer's measure and dubbed him Lakota-Kokipa-Koshkala—'Young-man-afraid-of-Indians'. Royer spent most of his time barricaded inside his agency office desperately dispatching telegrams begging Washington for troops to make the Indians behave: 'Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. We need protection and we need it now.'

Agent's hysteria brings troops

After a few weeks of Royer's hysterical pleadings, the Department of the Interior transferred authority over the Sioux reservations to the War Department in November 1890. Troops moved into the Sioux reservations. Among the first troops to arrive were eight companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, a famous Indian-fighting unit that had been soundly beaten by the Sioux in 1876, with the loss of its commander General George Armstrong Custer and almost 300 men. Other units included a battalion of the 9th Cavalry, black troopers the Indians called 'The Buffalo Soldiers', and smaller detachments of 5th Artillery, 8th Infantry, and 2nd Infantry.

Though 14 years had passed since the 7th Cavalry's defeat at the Little Big Horn, the War Department had never got around to replacing the Springfield 45-70 carbine that was said by some officers to have been a major factor in Custer's defeat. The Springfield was a breechloader with a pop-up breech based on the so-called Allin Conversion, a scheme to convert thousands of muzzle-loaders to breech-loaders during the Civil War. The Springfield had a tendency to jam, and after the Little Big Horn soldiers claimed to have found evidence that many of the 7th's carbines had jammed in action. As a sidearm the troopers also carried the Colt .45 revolver, a reliable, if short-ranged weapon. Sabres, though standard issue, were rarely used in Indian fighting.

The troopers were backed with artillery support from the Gatling Gun—a 10-barrelled .45 calibre MG which could deliver 1,200rpm with a good man on the crank—and by the Hotchkiss Mountain Gun, a 1.65in rifled breechloading cannon which could fire 40 to 50 2lb explosive shells per minute. It was made in France under contract. The Gatling had played some small part in previous campaigns, but the Hotchkiss gun had never been used before in Indian fighting.

The arrival of the troops may have comforted the agents, but it alarmed the Indians, who had been caught in surprise attacks several times in the past and had suffered losses in men, women, and children from over-eager soldiers. Some of the better people both in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and in the Army realized that the Ghost Dance was essentially peaceful and that military presence could only lead to trouble.

'I should let the dancing continue,' said Dr Valentine McGillycuddy, a former agent at Pine Ridge. 'If the Seventh Day Adventists prepare their ascension robes for the Second Coming of the Savior, the United States Army is not put in motion to prevent them . . . If the troops remain, trouble is



△ An Oglala Sioux brave and his squaw dressed for the bitter winter weather of Dakota. The brave is armed with a Winchester repeater. The squaw's tomahawk was bought from agency traders as were the blankets. Indians were frequently cheated by unscrupulous traders.

△ The Ghost Dance spread through the Sioux reservations of Dakota after the Paiute mystic Wovoka had seen the return of Christ in a vision: the white man would be destroyed and the red man would inherit the earth.

▷ Indian scouts at the Pine Ridge agency. The white man used men like these to police their own people. It was Indian police who went to arrest, and ended up killing, Sitting Bull.

sure to come.'

But when trouble did come, it came not from the troops but from the Indian Agent at Standing Rock, James McLaughlin. For 10 years, McLaughlin had been locked in a power struggle with Sitting Bull—the most respected of the Sioux chiefs—to control the Indians of his agency. Though Sitting Bull was only a luke-warm adherent of the Ghost Dance and inclined to be tractable, McLaughlin saw the unrest of the reservation as a chance to humiliate his old enemy. After McLaughlin foiled some confused attempts by the Army to take Sitting Bull into protective custody, the agent sent his own Indian Police to arrest the old chief, with a written order that concluded :

'Ps. You must not let him escape under any circumstances.'

The Indian Police and Sitting Bull's followers got into an argument as the policemen tried to drag Sitting Bull away on 15 December, and the old chief was killed by a vengeful policeman who was himself shot. The Sitting Bull faction began firing and surrounded the police. Soldiers had to move in to rescue them. The soldiers fired a Hotchkiss gun at the Indians and many of Sitting Bull's followers fled from the shellfire.

With Sitting Bull dead, the two chiefs who were said to be trouble-makers at the northern agencies were Hump and Big Foot. This was an odd choice in Big Foot's case. He had always spoken out for peace with the whites. But when some of the refugees from Sitting Bull's band showed up at his camp on Cheyenne River Reservation he gave them

shelter. By now, the Army was committed to interfering in Indian Affairs and they dispatched a civilian named Dunn to tell Big Foot to evict the refugees and send them back to Standing Rock where they belonged. Dunn apparently tried to reinforce the seriousness of this command by telling the nervous Indians that the soldiers would come for the Standing Rock Indians and would kill any of Big Foot's people who tried to intervene. This was all the Indians needed to hear. As soon as Dunn had left their camp, they packed up their tents and fled the reservation, headed south to either join the Sioux at Pine Ridge and throw themselves under the protection of Chief Red Cloud, or to hide in the Badlands, a desert region just off the reservation, until things blew over.

A few days out, Big Foot's band was intercepted by four companies of the 7th Cavalry under Major S. M. Whitside. Big Foot held up a white flag for a parley and was told that he would have to surrender unconditionally to the Army. The chief, who did not consider himself at war, accepted this with the best possible grace, and placed his band of 300 Indians under the protection of the 200 cavalry. That night, the two parties camped at a place called Wounded Knee Creek.

Shortly, Whitside's party was reinforced by Col. James Forsyth, with four more companies of the 7th and four Hotchkiss guns. Forsyth gave the hungry Indians some food and sent his surgeon and a stove to Big Foot, who was sick with pneumonia. But he also had the Hotchkiss guns set up



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on a hill overlooking the Indian camp to provide covering fire in case of trouble.

Both sides passed a restless night. The Indians had all heard stories of surprise attacks and slaughters of their people by soldiers. The soldiers, for their part, were mostly immigrants, new recruits or boys from city slums who had absorbed their knowledge of Indians from sensationalist dime novels—the comic books of the era, in which every Indian was a raping, torturing brute and Indian women delighted in tormenting wounded soldiers. Many of them also reflected on the relative unreliability of their Springfield carbines against the Henry or Winchester repeaters which the Sioux often owned. Each side viewed the other with

suspicion and fear.

The next morning—29 December—Forsyth decided to search the captured Indians for guns before proceeding to Pine Ridge. He formed his men in a three-sided formation around the warriors, who were lined up for inspection. The women and children remained in the tipi camp behind their men. Forsyth's first order for the Indians to hand over their hidden weapons brought a sullen response. Unlike the white soldiers, the Indians owned their own rifles. They were both a symbol of their pride and manhood and a vital tool of their existence. Only two Indians surrendered their guns.

Forsyth sent some of his men to search the tipi camp for weapons. The soldiers barged in the tents, frightening the Indian women and children, and overturning bedding in their quest of weapons, and, possibly, for souvenirs. They returned with 38 old firearms and some axes. It became clear that some of the Indians were hiding weapons under their blankets. According to one story, a young officer discovered a concealed rifle on a young Indian, who was deaf. The two men wrestled over the rifle and it was discharged.

The 'Battle' of Wounded Knee was on.

No cover—no chance!

The first aggression came from the troopers who unleashed a blast of concentrated fire at point-blank range. This killed or wounded fully half of the Indian men before they had a chance to get off a shot in retaliation. At this, some of the Indians produced the rifles they had been hiding for self-defense and opened fire on the soldiers. With no cover, and with many of the Sioux unarmed, this phase of the fighting lasted a few minutes at most. While the Indian warriors and soldiers were shooting it out at close range, the Hotchkiss guns opened fire—not on the braves, but on the tipi camp full of women and children. The Indian women fled screaming as shells tracked them across the snow.

The officers had lost all control of their men by this time. Some of the soldiers fanned out to run across the battlefield and finish off wounded Indians. Others leaped onto their horses and pursued the fleeing women and children.

'I was shot in the leg and I fell down,' a Sioux named Iron Shirt said. 'They knew I was wounded and helpless and they came and shot me all over again, in the chest . . . The soldiers were going around the field and the men and women were wounded and could not help themselves, and the soldiers came over there and put bullets through them.'

'I missed my wife and later found out that she was shot through the breast. The little 22-day-old baby was nursing from the same side where she was wounded, and the child was choked with blood. A few days afterward the little boy died.'

An Indian named American Horse said later: 'There was a woman with an infant in her arms who was killed as she almost touched the flag of truce, and the women and children were strewn all along the circular village until they were dispatched. The women as they were fleeing with their babies on their backs were killed together, shot right through, and the women who were very heavy with child were also shot.' Some women and children were found as far as three miles away, shot in the backs at close range, their robes marked with powder burns.

'After it was all over, it was an awful sight to see', a trooper named Eugene Caldwell wrote. 'It made me sick to look at it. Some of the men went wild. They would shoot men or women.'

Forsyth's tactics had been a disaster. Besides losing



control of his own men, he had positioned them in such a formation that many were casualties of their own cross-fire. The Army lost one officer and 24 men dead on the field, and another 30 wounded. Many of these were hit by their own fire or Hotchkiss shell fragments. The Indian dead, by a hasty count, were 154, but many others must have been overlooked.

The noise of firing and contact with shocked, bloody survivors brought a swarm of vengeful Sioux out from their agency, and the skirmishing of angry Indians and a snow-storm drove Forsyth's men from the field. They piled the 51 living Indians who had survived their onslaught into wagons and took them to Pine Ridge for medical treatment. The end result of Wounded Knee—besides murder of non-combatants—was to spark off a full-scale insurrection. About 4,000 Indians fled their agency and went into hiding in the Badlands, sallying forth to plunder abandoned ranches for food.

The next day, 30 December, brought garbled reports of an



Smithsonian Institute photo No. 55018-1

Indian attack on Drexel Mission, a Catholic church and school of Sioux children about five miles from Pine Ridge. Col. Forsyth rode out with eight companies to rescue the priests and nuns and the 100 Indian children at the school. The rumors proved to be false. The Indians regarded the priests at Drexel Mission as friendly and left them alone. Instead, they had been burning abandoned ranches in the vicinity. But Forsyth managed to pull off another disaster. He left his cavalry positioned in a valley when he went to confer with the priests. The Indians discovered the white soldiers, seized the surrounding high ground, and began to pour a withering fire into the 7th. An officer and a soldier were killed and seven men seriously wounded. Only disagreements among the Indians over whether to mount a charge or negotiate saved the 7th from much heavier losses. While the Sioux argued among themselves, the 9th Cavalry Regiment and two Hotchkiss guns arrived from Pine Ridge, at the end of a ride of 100 miles in the last 30 hours. The black troopers tilted the balance against the Sioux, and the

Indians pulled back and left the 7th to lick their wounds.

Scattered fighting continued. On New Year's Day, the Sioux killed and mutilated a civilian herder named Henry Miller, the only white civilian killed in the Sioux War of 1890-91. The same day, an Army burial detail arrived at Wounded Knee to dispose of the Indian bodies. They found four children still alive, huddled in their slain mothers' blankets and overlooked by both sides. Three of the four babies died, but the fourth was adopted by a white soldier. The 146 dead Indians on the field, frozen stiff in grotesque postures of violent death, were heaved into a mass grave while soldiers posed for photographs.

'It was a thing to melt the heart of a man, if it was of stone, to see those little children with their bodies shot to pieces, thrown naked into the pit,' one soldier wrote.

Through the first week of January, soldiers and Indians clashed in small battles, with a few dead on each side. A popular officer, Lieutenant E. W. Casey, was shot down at the head of his Cheyenne Indian Scouts.

Meanwhile, off the reservation, six whites attacked two peaceful Indian families out hunting. They had a pass from their agent, but the white men killed an old man named Few Tails, and wounded his wife. The injured woman made her way to the camp of some soldiers, who bandaged her and returned her to her people. The Army made noises about having the white murderers arrested, but the civil authorities in South Dakota refused to arrest white men for killing Indians.

Freezing and near starvation in the Badlands, the 4,000 Sioux hostiles listened to some advice from Chief Red Cloud, last of the old Sioux war leaders. 'Brothers, this is a very hard winter,' said the old chief. 'The women and children are starving and freezing. If this were summer, I would say to keep on fighting to the end. But we cannot do this. We must think of the women and children and that it is very bad for them. So we must make peace, and I will see that nobody is hurt by the soldiers.'

On 16 January, the last of the Sioux hostiles laid down

△ The frozen corpse of Chief Big Foot lies in grotesque poignancy after the 'battle'. Already dying from pneumonia, and offering no resistance he was shot down in cold blood.

▽ Burying the dead Indians at Wounded Knee. Emphasis on the massacre being called a 'battle' has continued down to the present day, even though all official accounts point to unwarranted killing of both sexes and all ages.



John Koster



Photograph courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

their weapons and reported back to their agencies. The last major Red Indian War was over. It had been a tawdry war at best, brought on by a Congress that broke its promise to feed the Indians and agents who violated the United States Constitution in suppressing Indian religious rituals. While the Army had been dragged in more or less against its better judgement, the Wounded Knee Massacre was destined to be one of the most shameful incidents in US military history. And compared with the prodigies of mobility and valor that had characterized their early wars with the whites, the Indians did not acquit themselves too well. But some of them retained a semblance of pride and dignity. When the Army Commander, Major General Nelson A. Miles, demanded that the Sioux hand over the men who had killed Miller, the herder, and Lt. Casey, Chief Young-Man-Afraid-of-his-Horses bluntly refused. 'No, I will not surrender them, but if you will bring the white men who killed Few Tails, I will bring the Indians who killed the white soldier and the herder. And right out here in front of

your tipi, I will have my young men shoot the Indians and you have your soldiers shoot the white men, and then we will be done with the whole business.'

But General Miles was not disposed to see equal justice done in this way and it might be said that the Sioux of South Dakota are still waiting for justice today, 85 years after Wounded Knee. At the time it took place, the incident was passed off as a legitimate battle by the eastern newspapers that seemed to gloat over the Army's berserk rampage. But history has tended to support the Indians' contention that Wounded Knee was a ruthless massacre, touched off by a hot-head on one side or the other but fanned by the ignorant prejudice that badly disciplined soldiers felt for the Indians. The Indians involved were not wild savages, but confused people who had been forced to rely on government charity, which usually did not materialize. In a sense, it may not have been the last battle of the Indian Wars, but one of the first 'race riots' in American history.

John Koster

▽ The appalling aftermath of the 'Battle' of Wounded Knee. The slain lie frozen in the snows of New Year's Day 1891. The US soldiers barbarously mutilated many of the dead—like the medicine-man sprawled over the bodies of his tribesmen.

▷ *Mission accomplished. Soldiers move in among the dead and dying Sioux.*

Like many fighting men before and after them, these soldiers pose for a souvenir photograph near the scene of their 'victory'.



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Fourth of July 1976 celebrates the bi-centenary of the most powerful nation on earth. The discovery, founding and progress of the USA was an unmitigated disaster for the 'first Americans'—the Red Indian. Denied any access to the white man's civilization, their lands were stolen and their own culture ruthlessly suppressed. The understandable resistance of the red man to the persecution, broken treaties and trickery—which began with Spaniards—continued against all the odds until the white man provoked the last gasp of defiance by the 'Battle' of Wounded Knee.



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MAILLY-LE-CAMP



'If you're going to die—die like a man!' What went wrong as the German night-fighters struck?

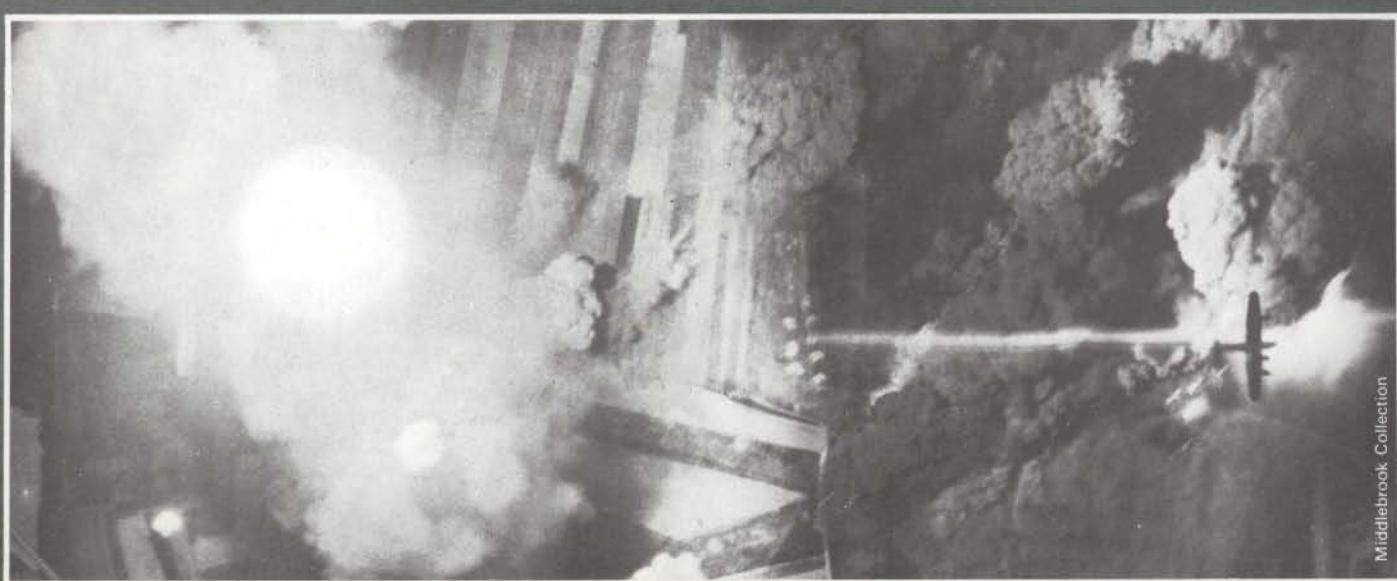
'Why can't we go in and bomb now?' called a plaintive Canadian voice. 'Dry your bloody tears!' came the anonymous reply. It was a unique and unholy RAF 'flap' during a precision raid on Occupied France in 1944.

While Bomber Command's contribution to World War II is usually remembered for its sustained night bombing offensive against the industrial heartland of Germany, there was a six-month period in the middle of 1944—the year of the Allied invasion of Europe—when Bomber Command's main role was to bomb purely military targets. Many feared that the bombers could not yet hit such small targets without killing many civilians in German-occupied countries, but these raids achieved unexpectedly brilliant results.

High on the target list allocated to Bomber Command in preparation for D-day stood the name of Mailly-le-Camp. The village of Mailly is situated 80 miles east of Paris, between the towns of Troyes and Châlons-sur-Marne. At one

end of the village was a former French Army camp with barrack buildings, offices, workshops and a large armored-vehicle exercise area. This large camp was known to be used by the Germans for the training and reinforcement of front-line *Panzer* units and was believed to hold at least 10,000 men.

On 3 May Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur T. Harris, C-in-C, Bomber Command, decided that conditions were ripe for an attack on Mailly-le-Camp during the coming night of a threequarters moon. Cloudless conditions were forecast for northern France. Harris decided that only two of his six bomber groups would carry out the raid—Nos 1 and 5 Groups, both equipped with the Lancaster, the best heavy bomber in service at that time. One of 5 Group's units was No. 617 Squadron, the famous 'Dambusters', led by 27-year-old Wing Commander Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire, subsequently awarded the VC for his development and



Middlebrook Collection

A four-engined Avro Lancaster of RAF Bomber Command makes a low pass over a war-time airfield.

<▽ Bomb-Aimer Flt. Sgt. Patfield, in a Lancaster of 61 Sqdn, took this photograph of another aircraft on its bombing run over Mailly on 4/5 May 1944. Towering columns of smoke rise from HE hits. Some 1,500 tons of bombs were dropped and over 160 buildings were destroyed or damaged, together with over a hundred vehicles, including tanks.

Quotations from Crown copyright records in the Public Record Office appear by permission of the Controller of HM Stationery Office. Extracts from Squadron Operational Record Books are from PRO AIR 27/688 (83 Sqdn.) and AIR 27/1931 (467 Sqdn.). German material was provided by Bundesarchiv, Koblenz. Map details come from survivors of shot-down bombers and from material provided by the Air Historical Branch (particularly by Mr. D. C. Bateman) and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



execution of pin-point, low-level marking. No. 1 Group usually operated with the main strength of Bomber Command and had no specialist squadrons.

The plan of attack had two basic requirements. First, placing of target markers and subsequent bombing had to be extremely accurate so that the village should not be hit. Secondly, the attack had to develop quickly before the Germans could take cover in their air raid shelters and before German night fighters could arrive on the scene. These two requirements were not easily satisfied, but a plan was evolved after several hours of consultation between Bomber Command staff officers and the two Groups concerned.

The attack was timed to open at midnight, one minute after the traditional time for all soldiers to return to camp. Three 'Aiming Points' were chosen—one at each end of the main group of barrack buildings and a third at the tank workshops some distance away. W/Cdr. Cheshire was to lead four Mosquito light bombers to place markers, from a low-level, on the first of these Aiming Points. Experienced Pathfinder crews from Nos 83 and 97 Squadrons would illuminate the area with flares to assist the Mosquito crews

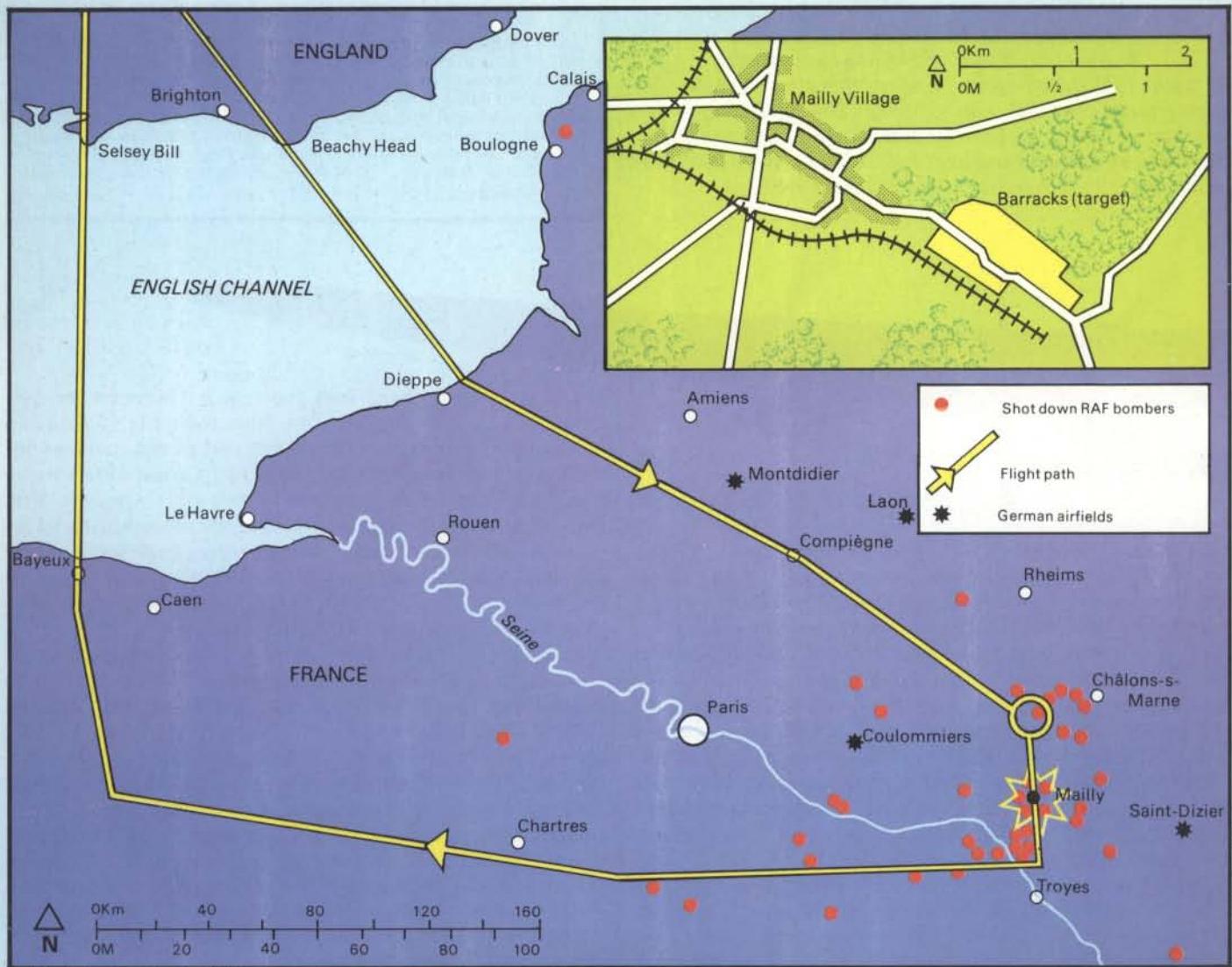
The first Aiming Point was then to be bombed by 140 Lancasters of 5 Group. Ten minutes later Cheshire's Mosquitos were to mark the other end of the barracks for the second wave—140 Lancasters of 1 Group. While these two attacks were in progress, crews of 1 Group's new marker unit would mark the tank-repair workshops and 30 more 1 Group Lancasters would bomb that target. Only 4,000lb 'blockbusters' and 500lb HE bombs were to be dropped—no incendiaries. Each Lancaster carried one 'blockbuster' and 15 or 16 500lb bombs.

Really accurate bombing of Mailly-le-Camp demanded strict control. Cheshire was designated 'Marker Leader' to ensure that the markers fell into the camp and not the village. Wing Commander L. C. Deane of 83 Squadron was to be the 'Main Force Controller' and would call in the bombers only when Cheshire was satisfied with the marking. Another 83 Sqdn. pilot, Squadron Leader E. N. M. Sparks, would act as 'Deputy Controller' if Deane was shot down or had to turn back with mechanical trouble. Although the attack was planned to last 29 minutes the timetable could be altered by Cheshire and Deane.

Soon after 2200 on 4 May, 346 heavily laden Lancasters started taking off from their Lincolnshire airfields. The weather was fine, the visibility clear, and there were no take-off accidents. Climbing steadily, the bombers flew almost due south to the first turning point at Reading and then SE over Beachy Head and across the Channel to Dieppe. The French coast was crossed at 12,000ft, the



**WAITING LANCASTER AND
BOMB-TROLLEY WITH TALLBOY BOMB**



Flight-plan of the RAF raid on Mailly on 4/5 May 1944. The three-leg track took the 346 Lancasters north of Paris. Each red circle represents the place where a shot-down bomber crashed. Destroyed aircraft litter the ground north and south of the target.

In Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris's bombing interpretation room WAAFs use stereoscopic equipment to give three-dimensional pictures of bomb damage to German targets. Great skill was needed to make correct interpretations of the results of the RAF's hits on the German military and industrial targets. Reports from saboteurs and agents near the targets would be added to the RAF's assessment of the raids.



normal approach height for a raid on Germany. Once the coast was crossed down went the bombers' noses and the Lancasters raced straight across N. France in order to arrive in the Mailly area at 5,000ft.

German air defenses responded and the first interceptions were made near Compiègne, but these resulted in bomber crews claiming the destruction of three night fighters with a fourth 'probably destroyed'. No bombers were lost in these early encounters—an unusual outcome to combats between fighters and bombers still fully loaded.

W/Cdr. Cheshire had arrived in the target area eight minutes before Zero Hour but had then flown on to a nearby airfield, pretending to be an Intruder ('hit and run' raider) so as not to alarm Mailly. On his return he found the camp bathed in the light of flares dropped by Lancasters of 83 and 97 Sqdns., every building being clearly visible. In a shallow dive down to 1,500ft Cheshire aimed two huge red markers—known as Red Spot Fires—at the first Aiming Point. These 'Red Spots' fell slightly NE of the target. Cheshire refused to allow bombing and called in another Mosquito to place fresh markers. Squadron Leader D. J. Shannon, one of the original 'Dambusters', dived to within 400ft of the ground to place his two Red Spot Fires in just the right place. Cheshire told W/Cdr. Deane, the Main Force Controller, that he was satisfied, Deane called in the first wave of Lancasters to bomb these markers.

Now, the first hint of trouble ...

While Cheshire and his deputy carried out their careful marking of the target, the 140 (5 Group) Lancasters of the first wave had been orbiting at 5,000ft over a holding position, 15 miles north of Mailly, marked by yellow Target Indicators which cascaded in the air and then burned vividly on the ground. But now came the first hint of trouble.

S/Ldr. Shannon's markers had been placed at 0006 and immediately assessed as accurate—only four minutes behind schedule. Although W/Cdr. Deane immediately started calling the first wave of Lancasters in to bomb, only a few aircraft responded. Unfortunately the transmission on Deane's TR1196 VHF radio set could not be heard because a much stronger American news broadcast was drowning it. Deane tried the alternative method of communication, by Morse through his wireless operator's T1154/R1155 set. Tragically, this also proved useless. Next morning, when the set was examined, it was found to be 30 kilocycles off frequency!

Some pilots had heard a garbled version of Deane's orders through the American broadcast and, when these bombed, a few more followed on their own initiative. These crews were the lucky ones. Their bomb-aimers were able to guide them over a well-marked and clearly visible target and from the unusually low bombing height found no difficulty in placing their five-ton HE loads on the German camp.

The best-placed observers were the Mosquito crews: 'When the bombing started it looked very effective. From our low-level position we could see very well; it was bright and men could be seen running from the barrack blocks to zig-zag trenches nearby. We flew around and dive-bombed the light flak positions which were hose-piping tracer up at the Main Force. When attacked, the guns stopped firing; whether this was due to our hits, fright or wisdom, I could not say.'

Cheshire, as marking force leader, was now in a cruel dilemma. The first markers were becoming obscured yet a few first wave Lancasters continued to bomb. Cheshire

could see that an air battle would inevitably develop and was inclined to abandon further marking. He asked the Main Force Controller to bring the second wave straight in before too many aircraft were lost. W/Cdr. Deane attempted to pass on this order but again went unheard. Cheshire himself attempted to communicate directly with the Main Force, urging them to come in and bomb and even tried the extreme measure of ordering the raid to be abandoned and everyone to go home, but the Main Force never heard him.

The frustrated Cheshire now ordered in his two remaining Mosquito markers. Flight Lieutenants G. A. Fawke and R. S. D. Kearns, a New Zealander, dived to within 3,000ft of the ground and released their Red Spot Fires on the western end of the camp. Both pilots courageously flew across the target amid light flak while Lancasters continued to bomb, but their markers were soon lost to sight. One of the reserve Lancaster marker aircraft was now called to place its markers 'on the western edge of the fires with a slight undershoot'. Flying Officer H. W. J. Edwards of 97 Sqdn. flew in; his bomb-aimer, F/O J. Skingley, released the 10 Red Spots which almost filled the big Lancaster bomb bay and earned himself Cheshire's congratulations when the markers went down at the desired place.

The first Lancaster blew up

While all this was happening at Mailly there was serious trouble over the orbiting point 15 miles away. Many 5 Group aircraft had not heard the order to bomb and remained flying in wide circles above the ground marker. The 140 (1 Group) Lancasters of the second wave had arrived at the orbiting point and were also having to wait. The continued presence of over 200 heavy bombers 'marking time' above a bright yellow marker inevitably attracted German fighters. One Lancaster, detailed to back up the yellow marker, was chased right round its figure-of-eight marking pattern by a Junkers 88 but managed both to keep the markers going and shake off the German. But others were not so lucky and, with a sickening explosion in the sky, the first Lancaster blew up.

Most pilots were tuned in to one of the R/T channels and could, if they wished, themselves speak and be heard on the R/T set. Suddenly an angry voice came through, addressed to Cheshire: 'Pull your finger out!' It was not long before others joined in. The understandably frightened culprits would never be identified but this radio indiscipline unsettled other crews. It could only make the Controllers' work more difficult, and would probably be heard with glee by the Germans.

Suddenly, the Main Force pilots received their first clear orders: 'Don't bomb! Wait!' These came from S/Ldr. Sparks, the Deputy Controller. He had earlier only heard Deane's garbled voice through the American programme. Sparks had been in a quandary. If his chief had been shot down, it would have been Sparks' clear duty to take over but Deane was obviously present over Mailly and attempting to control the raid. Sparks had waited several minutes, but, with Deane still indistinct, decided to take charge using his aircraft's W/T transmitter. Later he even found a clear R/T channel on which to talk directly with the Main Force.

Spark's voice did not abate the radio panic. One tail gunner remembers: 'We circled and circled for what seemed an eternity without receiving any instructions. During this time German fighter activity became more intense. There was tracer everywhere and aircraft were going down in flames all around us, but still no instructions. One could



This Lancaster B1, serial No. ME703, carrying the letters UL (code letters of 576 Sqdn), got back from Mailly to make a crash-landing. It is likely both the rear turret and tail fin broke away during the forced landing and as the bomber slewed off the runway. It was luckier than the 42 Lancasters which failed to return from the shambles over Mailly on the night of 4/5 May 1944. Their crashes are plotted on the flight plan of the raid plotted on p.34.

Bruce Robertson

sense the bombing force getting restless, like a herd ready to stampede and this was emphasised by the remarks made over the air, some of which should have turned the night sky blue, I heard one pilot's voice, "For Christ's sake shut up and give my gunners a chance". When I heard this remark I thought—"God help them if they are being attacked with this lot going on". But always the same stock phrase "Don't bomb! Wait!".

Another, a pilot: 'I switched on for the Main Controller's commentary and was surprised to hear him ordering the Main Force to wait as the target had not yet been marked. The air was really blue with a succession of replies from the Main Force. I had never before heard R/T indiscipline and this was really the measure of the panic and fear that was abroad that night. This was quite enough for me—I had no intention of joining the crowd round those deathtrap markers, so we turned east towards the darker sky'. Still the protests came. 'We heard brief snatches of R/T, on one occasion what sounded like an English voice saying: "For Christ's sake! I am on fire!"' This was replied to by a rough Australian voice saying: "If you are going to die, die like a man—quietly." A wing commander came up on the R/T, identified himself, and said: "This has got to stop. Cut your R/T and wait for instructions to bomb." But the frightened voices continued.'

More bombers went down. The Lancaster of Flight Sergeant George Gritty, No. 460 (Australian) Squadron, was caught by a single-engined fighter, easily identified in the bright moonlight as a Focke-Wulf 190. The German made three firing passes, then calmly stood off and watched the bomber burn. Three men baled out but then the flames reached the photo-flash and this, in turn, exploded the bombs. The Lancaster of F/Sgt. 'Lizzie' Lissette, a New Zealander of No. 207 Squadron, was also attacked by an FW 190. 'The tracer hit the port wing, blowing off the dinghy hatch. The dinghy then commenced to inflate, then shot back over the tailplane like a big hoopla ring. I could see down through the wing to the ground; the port undercarriage was partially down. A little later the rear gunner reported a fighter coming in port quarter down. We were hit again in the bomb bay and a small fire started.' A third attack soon finished off the Lancaster. The pilot remained at the controls to the end but again only three men out of seven baled out.

It was F/O Skingley's 10 Red Spot Fires, placed on the edge of the previous bombing area at Mailly, that ended this terrible wait. S/Ldr. Sparks now ordered: 'Go in and

bomb. All aircraft go in and bomb. Bomb the Red Spot Fires.' The time was 0024, amazingly only five minutes behind schedule for the second wave bombing run.

One pilot, in his debriefing, reported that 'when the order to bomb was finally given the rush was like the starting gate at the Derby.' In these last few minutes the target became a veritable inferno. The huge, dull explosions of the 4,000lb 'blockbusters' and the shorter flashes of the 500lb HE gleamed through the dense clouds of dust and smoke billowing over the camp. Some flak was still firing. There were momentary but vivid photo-flashes dropped by every aircraft so that a bombing photograph could be taken. The Red Spot Fires were soon blown out or covered up and the bombing spread back across the open fields to the north of the camp. At 5,000ft the Lancasters were rocked by their own bomb explosions and by exploding ammunition dumps in the German camp. For crews used to bombing German cities from 20,000ft it was a novel and awesome experience.

Some aircraft that did not hear S/Ldr. Sparks's orders until as late as 0030 and the last aircraft did not bomb until 0044—19 minutes after the attack should have closed. The last pilot to fly across the target was the faithful Deputy Main Force Controller, Neville Sparks.

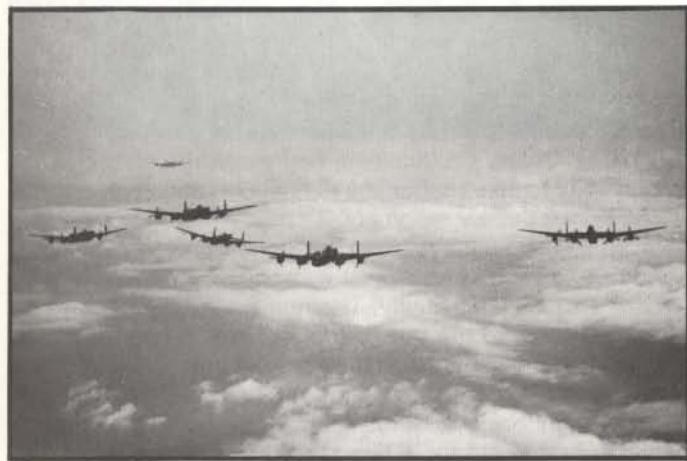
The delays at Mailly had given the Germans ample opportunity to direct their night fighters onto the bomber force. When the Lancasters turned for home, bright moonlight and the 'running commentary' put out by the German controllers enabled the *Nachtjagd* (see 'War Monthly' issue 18) to follow. One of these German fighters was a twin-engined Messerschmitt 110G-4/U1 of 4th Fighter Division piloted by *Hauptmann* Martin Drewes, whose airfield at Laon was only 65 miles from Mailly. Drewes' aircraft was one of the few fitted with the upward-firing *schräge Musik* ('Jazz Music') twin 30mm MK 108 cannon installation in the aft cockpit bulkhead. Such aircraft could abandon the traditional *von unten hinten* ('underneath, behind') method of attack, which at least gave the bomber's rear gunner a chance, and make their attack with cannon tilted at 15° fired by the pilot with the help of a Rev C/12D reflector sight in almost complete safety from the blind spot underneath the bomber. Bomber Command had little knowledge of this weapon (first used in August 1943) and crews had not been warned of it. Drewes' radar operator, *Unteroffizier* Erich Handke, describes their experiences.

'We saw the target burning and this enabled us to get into the bomber stream. I guided my pilot with the SN-2 (a radar set) onto a bomber and, at 600 metres, we could see it by



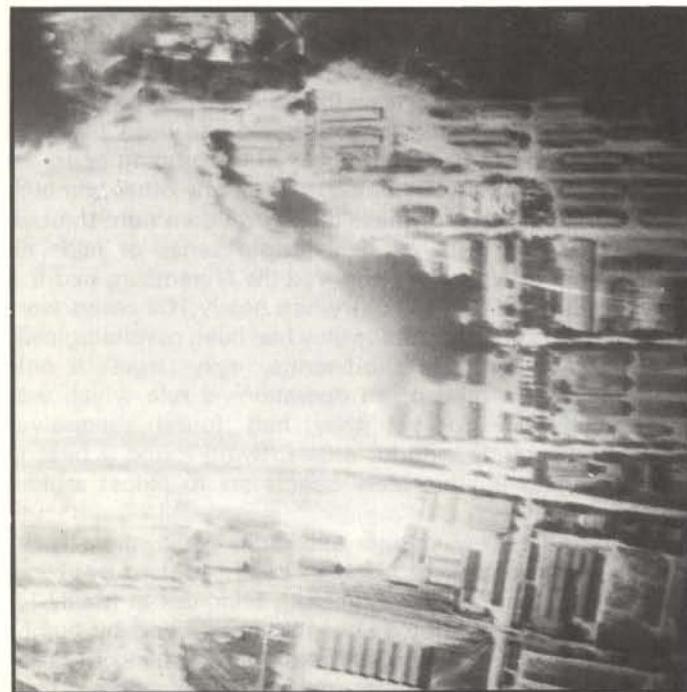
A trolley load of 500lb bombs, already fuzed, about to go into the Lancaster's capacious bomb-bay.

Imperial War Museum



For bombers there is protection in numbers. With some cloud cover, these Lancasters are on way to target.

Imperial War Museum



A marker flare lights up the target area early in the Mailly raid, before the buildings were destroyed.

eye. The weather was wonderful, almost full moon. We sat under the Lancaster which was only at 2,400 metres height. We shot from underneath into the wing which burned at once. Almost immediately the bomber went down in flames. I had already found another target; it was flying away to the west at 2,000 metres—another Lancaster. We got 500 metres underneath it and then climbed to within about 70 metres. We fired this time into the fuselage because we could now be sure there were no bombs there. There was a huge fire and it soon crashed.'

'We saw another aircraft straight ahead but lower, and we were soon underneath. We climbed a little then fired vertically with our *schräge Musik*. It burned and soon went down. The next one was spotted by Petz (the rear gunner) and once more we got into an attacking position but this time the Lancaster was climbing and we could not fire for some time until it settled down at 3,000 metres. After a long burst of fire into the fuselage the entire tail unit broke off and the remainder burst into bright flames and crashed.'

Within minutes, Drewes and his crew found themselves flying within sight of four more Lancasters but it took Drewes 20 minutes to get into a firing position underneath what Handke describes as 'the most peaceful one'. This 'kill' almost fell on top of the Me 110 and Drewes had to dive steeply to avoid his flaming victim. The five Lancasters Drewes and his crew had downed within 40 minutes brought their total score to 45 victories.

I had at most two minutes . . .

S/Ldr. Sparks was to pay for staying so long over Mailly: 'As we left the target my rear gunner, Warrant Officer 'Tiger' Teague, reported four fighters on our tail. I immediately started a corkscrew intending to lose height rapidly from 3,000ft to return as near ground level as possible and I took a straight line from Mailly towards England. During our second steep bank to the left I saw another fighter directly beneath us, perhaps 1,000ft below. I pressed on with the corkscrew but this chap somehow put perhaps a dozen cannon shells into my starboard wing fuel tanks. We had no nitrogen suppression and in a short time the top skin of the wing had burnt through with a mass of flame. I had seen so many Lancasters with burning wings that I knew my aircraft had at most two minutes before the main spar failed with a consequent uncontrollable spin.'

'I gave the order to bale out in my No. 2 method which was unofficial but known and practised by my crew. This method was that the crew were to get up and get out without delay and any intercom. This they did and I was sitting there keeping an eye on the burning wing and calling up all crew positions to check that no one was left on board. None was, and all lived. As I was calling the last position, the wing folded up and I immediately made a turning dive through the front hatch.'

The French Resistance found Sparks and told him that his rear gunner had shot down one of the German fighters. Sparks was back with his squadron at Coningsby seven weeks later.

Another return route combat was observed by a Lancaster pilot: 'I have a clear memory of the full bright moon without a cloud in the sky and of watching an FW 190 shooting down a Lanc from the stern. The fighter then carried on under the Lanc, drew ahead of a second bomber, then pulled up into a loop and half-rolled on the top. He then attacked the second Lanc head on and shot him down also. German or not, it was first-class flying and I could not but

admire his technique. Needless to say I opened all four 1 throttles and got the hell out of the place'.

Occasionally, bomber crews were able to hit back. One crew, on their first operation, chased a German fighter down to ground level and shot it down; the pilot and tail gunner, both Australians, won the Distinguished Flying Cross and Distinguished Flying Medal respectively. Another Lancaster crew shot down a fighter but their own aircraft was damaged so badly that all engines failed just before reaching the diversion airfield at Tangmere, Sussex. The New Zealand pilot made a successful glide-landing. The Operational Record Book of 97 Sqdn. shows that its crews used their initiative: 'Many of our aircraft flew at heights between fifty and 200ft above the ground often flying down German-occupied aerodromes, strafing searchlights and flak towers.'

The fortunes of war had not been kind to the bomber crews, but the Germans did not follow them over the Channel, no damaged aircraft crashed into the sea, and clear weather at their Lincolnshire airfields enabled survivors to land safely.

Out of 346 Lancasters that took off to bomb Mailly-le-Camp, 42 failed to return and two more were so badly damaged that they had to be written off. No. 5 Group, which supplied nearly all the marker aircraft and the entire first wave, lost 14 of its 173 Lancasters. No. 1 Group, dispatching another 173 Lancasters, suffered exactly twice 5 Group's losses. Its aircraft had been subject to the greatest delay at Mailly and 28 were lost—a casualty rate of 16 per cent. The hardest hit squadron of the 24 bombing was the Australian 460 Sqdn. from Binbrook—it had lost five crews; Nos 12, 50 and 101 Sqdns each lost four crews. One Intruder Mosquito and one Radio-Counter-Measures Halifax were also shot down.

Success for the 'Wild Boar'

The Germans claimed to have destroyed 57 four-engined bombers against actual losses of 44 over Mailly and three more on another raid. The Me 110 units of 4th Fighter Division (100 serviceable fighters on 31 May) stationed at Florennes, Coulommiers, Saint-Dizier and Laon achieved most of this success but single-engined FW 190 *Wilde Sau* ('Wild Boar') fighters, working without radar but by searchlight, moonlight and the bombers 'marker flares', scored at least four 'kills'. In return, the Mailly raiders claimed eight German fighters destroyed and two 'probables'.

Approximately 1,500 tons of bombs were dropped on Mailly—what had been achieved? Reconnaissance photographs taken two days later showed a great mass of bomb craters especially in the barrack blocks. No fewer than 114 barrack buildings, 47 transport sheds and workshops, and some ammunition stores had been hit.

According to *Bundesarchiv* records the camp housed a *Panzer* regiment HQ, three *Panzer* battalions (belonging to regiments on the Eastern Front) and elements of two more as well as the permanent training school staff. Casualties were 218 men listed as killed or missing and 156 wounded. More permanent staff were killed than men from visiting units and a high proportion of the dead were highly trained NCOs. The 102 vehicles destroyed included 37 tanks. Damage to the buildings was German assessed as '80 per cent destroyed, 20 per cent worth repairing.'

Bomber Command would have been disappointed to learn that only 374 Germans had been disabled when its own aircrew losses were around 300. The slight delay in the initial marking, and the slow development of the attack due



Imperial War Museum

to W/Cdr. Deane's difficulties, had given the Germans the opportunity to take shelter.

The *Bundesarchiv* report contains an interesting reference to a Sergeant Jack Worsfold, rear gunner in a 101 Sqdn. Lancaster, who had an almost miraculous escape when his aircraft was hit over Mailly. The rear turret broke away and fell with Worsfold trapped inside, but its fall was broken by some electricity cables, and he was able to walk away dazed but unhurt. The Germans thought that Worsfold was an agent dropped at Mailly to report on the raid. It was some time before they accepted him as an ordinary airman.

Many crews who had returned to England were naturally bitter at the costly delays. In 1 Group there was much criticism of 5 Group in general and of Cheshire in particular; he was thought to have been unnecessarily careful about the marking. This was unfair. The complicated plan and the communications failures were the main causes of the delay.

The least glorious aspect of the raid had been the radio indiscipline of the crews held back at the orbiting point. So far as is known, this never occurred on any other bombing operation. But some of these men had flown right through the past winter with its hard-fought series of raids on distant targets. Many had survived the Nuremberg raid five weeks earlier (30/31 March) when nearly 100 crews were lost. On this night over Mailly they had been psychologically geared up to fly on a short-range, 'easy target'. It only counted as one third of an operation—a rule which was immediately altered—yet they had found themselves waiting apparently without orders, flying round a beacon while German fighters blew Lancasters to pieces around them.

But despite delay, danger and radio panic, there is no evidence that any crew failed to carry out its duty. There was no wild or scattered bombing. Enquiries at Mailly-le-Camp showed that not one civilian was killed by bombs although some were killed by crashing bombers. The men who flew to Mailly-le-Camp may have shown fear. They did not show cowardice.

Martin Middlebrook

2



3



Peter Saeson/Tony Bryan

1 The Panzer training camp at Mailly before the raid of 4/5 May. Zig-zag slit trenches had been dug in the grounds of the former French Army establishment.

2 A Mk 1 Lancaster in night operations coloring.

3 The same area as Pic 1 after the RAF's attack.

Practically every building is destroyed or damaged. Near-misses on slit-trenches would have caused casualties from blast and concussion. The workshop area (top left) has been particularly badly hit.

4 A wider view of the area of Mailly. The accuracy of the RAF's bomb-aimers and their Mk XIV sights is clearly demonstrated. Nearby fields have no more than a sprinkling of bomb craters.

4



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Imperial War Museum

CELLES 1944

An unhappy Christmas for Hitler as his elite Panzer troops cracked in the 'Bulge' battle for Celles

Four days after Hitler had launched three armies through the Ardennes in his desperate attempt to split the Western Allies, only one of the armored thrusts was still advancing on 20 December 1944, towards the first objective, the Meuse river crossings. This was the crack 47 Panzer Corps, from Fifth Panzer Army, commanded by one of the Wehrmacht's most experienced tank generals, Heinrich Freiherr von Lüttwitz. The Corps' spearhead was his previous command, the *elite* 2nd (Vienna) Panzer Division which, after being reduced to three tanks during the Normandy campaign, had been made up to full strength of 14,000 men for the Ardennes winter offensive. During the autumn it had received 27 Panzer Mk IVs, 58 (Mk V) Panthers and 48 Jagdpanther tank destroyers.

But, instead of slicing through the weak American defenses and crossing the Meuse by 18 or 19 December on the way to Brussels, they had been delayed by unexpectedly stubborn resistance from outnumbered and outgunned American units, by atrocious roads and by bridges blown at the last moment. Although they had a bridgehead over the Ourthe river by 21 December, their fuel, ammunition and

other supplies needed the whole of that day to trickle along the narrow, congested, muddy forest roads of the Ardennes. Colonel Meinrad von Lauchert, 2nd Panzer's new, aggressive commander, took advantage of this enforced halt to allow his exhausted men to catch up on their sleep after five days of almost non-stop fighting. He also brought up his AA batteries knowing that the mist and fog which had so far saved him from the terrible *Jabos*, the Allied fighter-bombers, would be bound to clear.

The 24-hour German halt in the center was a life-saver for the Allies, because at dawn on 21 December there had been very little between 2nd Panzer's spearhead and the Meuse bridges south of Namur. The ferocity and weight of the German offensive on 16 December had forced the Americans to commit everything to block Sixth SS Panzer Army's main thrust in the north and to deny the vital road junctions of St. Vith and Bastogne to Fifth Panzer Army. When the latter's commander, General Hasso von Manteuffel, ordered his Panzer divisions to bypass Bastogne and strike NW, the American flank was wide open.

But even before General Dwight D. Eisenhower gave



Robert Hunt Library

△ In some of the worst weather of World War II in Western Europe, an M7 SP gun prepares to unleash its 105mm howitzer against German positions.

◁ German troops rush past a blazing half-track — 16 December 1944. They are part of Hitler's last-ditch attempt to stem the advance of the Western Allies.

command of the northern half of the 'Bulge' to Field-Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, the British commander had ordered his 30th Corps into the Liège-Brussels area ready to drive into the flank of the Germans should they succeed in crossing the Meuse. This move also freed all American forces north of the Meuse for the fighting on the other side. On 20 December, as soon as he was given command of the First and Ninth US Armies, Montgomery told Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, First Army commander, to find the necessary infantry and armored divisions to make up a Corps to shore up the open right wing.

This Corps' duty would be to block or slow down Fifth Panzer Army's advance towards Namur and Huy then mount a counter-attack to roll them back. Montgomery insisted on having 48-year-old Major General Joseph Lawton Collins as Corps commander. Collins, a dynamic, hard-driving general, had made his reputation in the bitter fighting for the Pacific islands of New Georgia and Guadalcanal. There he had commanded a division with such dash that he had been nicknamed 'Lightning Joe'. His 7th Corps had assaulted Utah Beach on D-day, captured Cherbourg, led the Normandy breakout, and, after distinguishing itself in the tough positional warfare of the Aachen salient, was holding part of Ninth US Army's line. Collins' battle-tried HQ handed over its division to 19th Corps and moved quickly down to First US Army's right. Lt. Gen. Hodges found three divisions to form the new 7th Corps: 84th

Infantry, already on its way south from Ninth Army; 75th Infantry, just landed in Europe, and 3rd Armored, already engaged on First Army's dangling right.

Two other moves, seemingly not so important, were to have far-reaching effects on the battle. First, Lieutenant-General Brian G. Horrocks, commander of British 30th Corps, decided to cover the Namur-Givet stretch of the Meuse, even though this lay to the west of the apparent German NW advance. He ordered 11th Armoured Division's 29th Armoured Brigade to move its three regiments of tanks (about 160) and supporting units down 'to deny the enemy the river crossings' from Namur to Givet inclusive. The second critical decision was the result of a visit to First US Army HQ by Montgomery's Chief of Operations, Brigadier David Belchem, who suggested that 2nd Armored Division, then in Ninth Army reserve, might be added to 7th Corps. Collins enthusiastically agreed as he considered 2nd and 3rd Armoured Divisions to be the best of the 16 in the US Army.

The US 2nd Armored Division, 'Hell on Wheels', was a regular army formation which had seen action since the North African landings, having fought at Kasserine Pass, in Sicily, at Anzio and in most of the heaviest fighting since Normandy. Its commander, Major General Ernest N. Harmon, believed in the gospel of attack at once and with everything. The division was alerted on 21 December and ordered to move immediately SE 70-90 miles, coming in behind 84th Infantry Division already deploying around Marche. The armor was to defend the roads leading to the Huy crossings and later bolster out 7th Corps' right wing for the counter-attack. In 22 hours 2nd Armored's three combat commands were in position although their movement over hazardous roads at night crashed eight tanks and 20 other vehicles. The green 75th Infantry came in behind 7th Corps center 'ready for immediate commitment', a



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daunting experience for untried soldiers. And 3rd Armored Division was ordered to fight its way south to come up on 84th Infantry's left.

Also on 21 December armored cars of the British 29th Armoured Brigade arrived around midday at the Namur, Dinant and Givet bridges and took up positions defending their approaches. At dusk that same day the leading tanks came in. As it turned out, the *Panzer Corps* was not heading for the Meuse at Huy as Allied Intelligence thought but for Dinant, about halfway between Namur and Givet, where Major General Erwin Rommel's 7th 'Ghost' *Panzer Division* had crossed the river in 1940.

Dinant's narrow streets mostly run parallel with the Meuse since steep bluffs confine the town within a narrow strip of land on the eastern bank. The British found the bridge defended by a mysterious formation known as 'R' Force and consisting of a number of elderly tank men with some veteran tanks and armored cars, a scratch force of sappers who had already mined the bridge and a single platoon of American infantry who were dealing with the continual stream of rear area personnel and fleeing civilians. These were the troops which would have had the task of defending the vital crossing had not Lauchert's 2nd *Panzer Division* spearhead run out of fuel.

The British tanks which came in at dusk and took up battle positions were some 60 Shermans of 3rd Royal Tank Regiment (3rd RTR) whose CO, Colonel A. W. Brown, was not at all happy about the situation: 'We were really out on a limb if the Germans pushed ahead . . . I had, at one time, three different orders about the bridge, all contradictory. There was a general air of flap and uncertainty.'

But the Germans did not come on and their High Command was dissatisfied with the slowness of the *Panzer* divisions, a far cry from the glorious days of the 1940 *blitzkrieg* through the Ardennes. Old Field Marshal Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt, C-in-C West, sent an ironic order: 'The *Panzers* should try and keep up with the infantry.' When Lauchert reported that his tanks had run out of fuel, Field Marshal Walther Model, commander of Army Group B, told him 'to get to the Meuse on foot'.

At dawn on 22 December 2nd *Panzer Division*, rested,

△ *Panther Ausf G* of 12th SS *Panzer Division* ablaze. The turret numbers show it is the sixth tank, 2nd Troop, 1st Company, in the Division's 1st *Panzer Battalion*.

▷ A *Panzer IV Ausf J* knocked out near Bastogne. Mk IVs (they had been in production since 1937) made up over a third of the 1,800 German tanks in the Ardennes.

▽ German submachine-gunners dash across a road littered with wrecked US equipment, including half-tracks.

refreshed and resupplied, moved off from Tenneville to cover the remaining 40 miles to the Meuse as quickly as possible. The advance guard consisted of a Mk IV tank battalion, one of Panthers, and 304th *Panzer grenadier* Regiment (two battalions of infantry in half-tracks). These units had the support of the bulk of the division's 74th *Panzer Artillery* Regiment (105 and 150mm SP guns) and its 273rd *Flak* Regiment (20 and 88mm AA). Right out in front was 2nd *Panzer Reconnaissance* Battalion, at least 800 heavily armed infantry in half-tracks with 35 armored cars and a dozen 75mm assault guns. Their function was to fight for as well as obtain information. The whole force, perhaps 70 AFVs, 5,000 men and 1,000 vehicles, was commanded by Major von Cochenhausen, a daring and resourceful tank man.

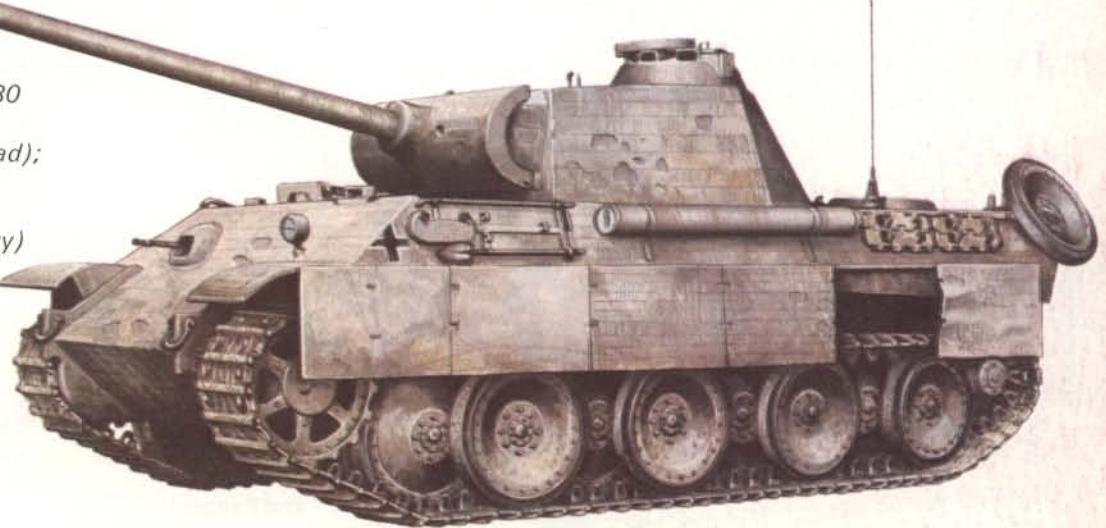
The Americans were in Marche where 84th Infantry had put out road blocks and linked up with 3rd Armored Division's reconnaissance (armored car) battalion on their left and were waiting for 2nd Armored Division's Combat Command B (CCB), to come in so they could extend westwards to tie in with the British on the Meuse river line.

As far as Col. Lauchert knew there was little to oppose his advance to the Meuse. 'Only weak patrol elements on our north flank,' he reported. 'Enemy morale seems very shaky.' Nevertheless he was not entirely satisfied that there was no opposition ahead, remembering Noville where he had lost 20 tanks and most of one of his four *Panzer grenadier* battalions on 19 December when US 101st Airborne Division suddenly appeared from nowhere. 'Because of the weather our recce aircraft can't operate and we have to depend entirely on ground patrols.'

Major Cochenhausen's advance was stopped during the

PANTHER PzKfw V, G

Engine Maybach HL 230
P30, 12 cyl, 700hp
Max speed 34mph (road);
 15mph (country)
Max range 110 miles
 (road); 55 miles (country)
Armament
 1 75mm KwK 42 L/70
 2 or 3 7.92mm MG34
Armor
 Front 3in
 Turret front 4in
 Side 1½in
 Top ½in
 Rear 1½in



Peter Saksen/Tony Bryan



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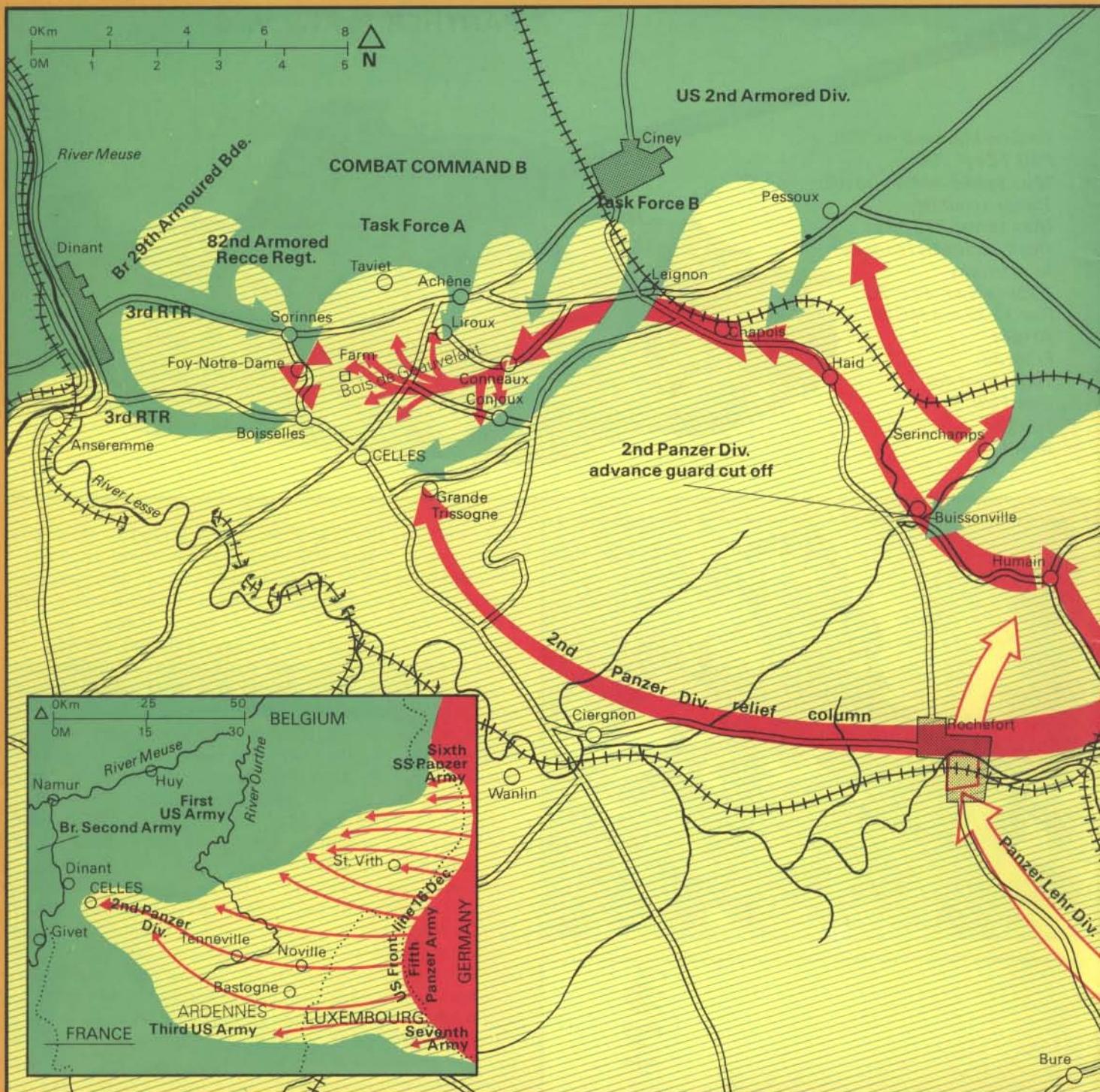


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afternoon just south of Holligne by a road block of 84th Infantry and a few M8 Staghound armored cars which knocked out a Mk IV and opened up with all their weapons: 2nd Panzer's probing tip recoiled and tried another route through Hargimont only to be stopped again by 84th Infantry at Marloie. It was already 1800 and the light had been gone for over an hour but Cochenhausen had been ordered to keep going during the night unless actually engaged. He now sent a *kubelwagen* jeep and a half-track to find a route. By midnight the village of Humain and the high ground NW of it was occupied. Here the advance guard stopped while the armor and SP guns came up and the rest of the strung-out division wound up its tail.

The division had advanced about 15 airline miles towards the Meuse and was about the same distance from Dinant. Col. Lauchert's appreciation that night was not quite so optimistic: 'The 84th Infantry Division seem to be holding the front Wanlin-Marche-Hotton and has been encountered by us at Rochefort, Bure and Hargimont. Enemy radio reveals important (2nd Armored's CCB) troop movements probably to extend 84th Infantry's front. Enemy planes have been little active up to now. The *Luftwaffe* have not yet intervened in the battle'. This was a bit of heavy sarcasm, for none of the German ground commanders had believed in the promise of *Luftwaffe* support for the Ardennes Offensive. Finally Lauchert reported his next moves: 'We will continue our advance along the axis Buissonville-Chapois-Conneaux with our main force. We will occupy the zone Celles-Conjoux and prepare to cross the Meuse at Ansereime.' This was the railway bridge south of Dinant. The division's projected advance was to the west and not, as the Allies were anticipating, to the NW.

On this same day, patrols from 3rd RTR in Dinant went forward to Marche where they made contact with 334th Regimental Combat Team of 84th Infantry Division which was able to tell them little except that, while they had been ordered to be ready to fight either east or NE, all their positive contacts that day had been to the south. This seemed to indicate a threat to Dinant and Col. Brown moved two squadrons of Shermans across the Meuse to cover the approaches to the bridge. No enemy were seen and at last



light the tanks were pulled in to form a tight laager between Sorinnes and Achêne with one 17pdr-armed Sherman ('Firefly') out on each road with orders to defend in place and to ensure that when knocked out the tank formed an effective road block.

The lead German units moved off from Humain at first light on 23 December and occupied Buissonville at 1100. A recce column went north through Serinchamps and another five miles NW to Pessoux without seeing any American troops. Col. Lauchert was encouraged and ordered Cochenhausen to push on hard, NW to Haid and then west towards Leignon and Conjourx. Just after the leading armor and carriers had gone through Haid heading towards Chapois, they bumped a small patrol from 2nd Armored

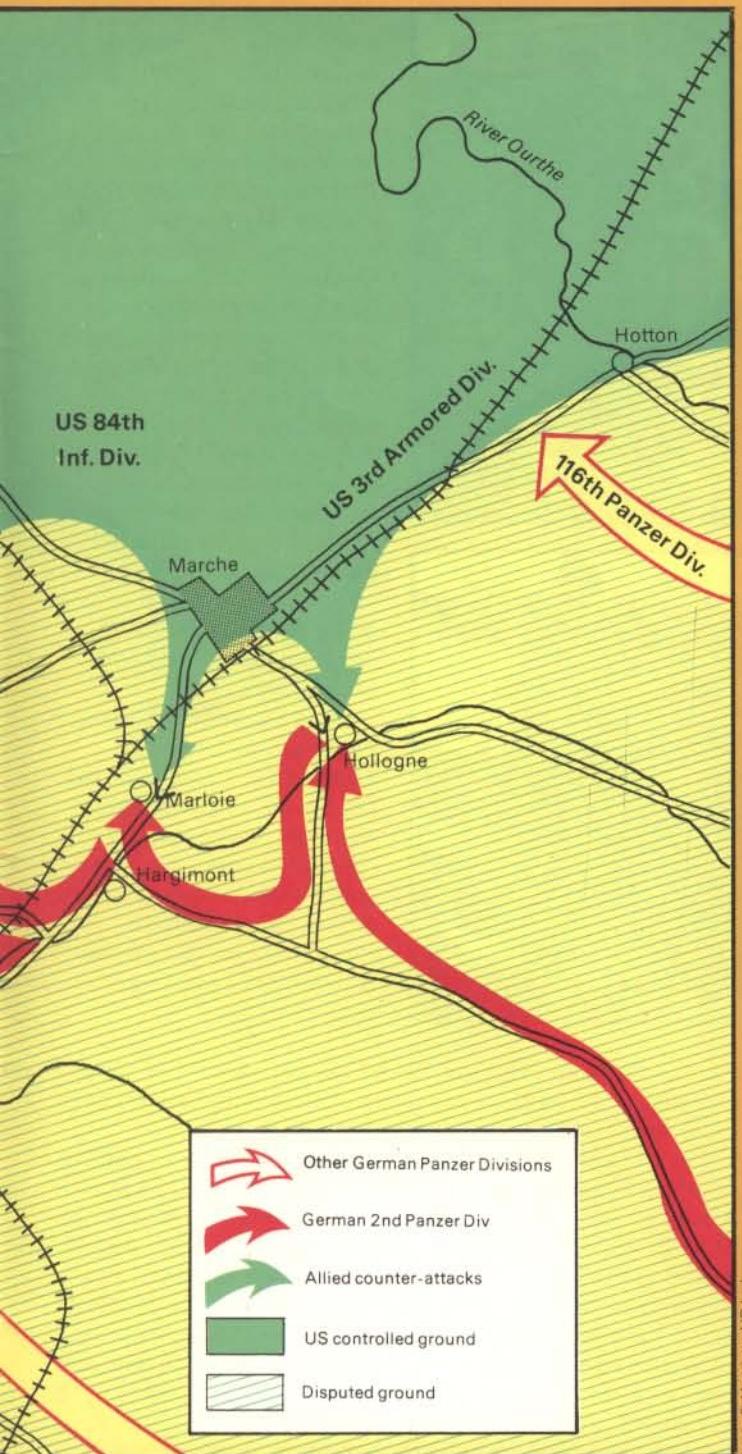
△ 2nd Panzer's lone and precarious thrust ended in disaster within sight of the Meuse.

▷ Field Marshal Karl Gerd von Rundstedt (1875-1953), titular commander of the Ardennes offensive.

▷ General Courtney H. Hodges (1887-1966).

Division's recce battalion and knocked out a scout car. The lieutenant in command was slightly wounded but got back to Maj.-Gen. Harmon who had just set up his HQ in Marche and reported German tanks on the road to Ciney.

One of the things that Montgomery was most anxious about during the 'Battle of the Bulge' was to maintain a 'tidy front' and to avoid getting embroiled in piecemeal fights before he was ready to launch 7th Corps' counter-



attack. His orders to Collins had been most explicit: he was not to get committed and if he were attacked he must 'roll with the punch'. Harmon had agreed but not with enthusiasm and on learning that Germans were already to his west he decided that he would have to secure his flank. He sent 17 Shermans to Ciney and ordered another 37 to follow as soon as possible. Then he phoned Collins, saying 'Joe I'm committed!'

However, as we have seen, Ciney was not threatened, for 2nd *Panzer* were heading west and not north and Cochenhausen moved south of Leignon and on to Conneaux where he set up his HQ and put tanks and guns and infantry at the edge of woods, emplaced on high ground and concealed in farm buildings. The rest of the division were due to follow during the night and Christmas Eve. It was anticipated that 2nd *Panzer* would be ready to cross the Meuse in strength on Christmas morning.

But on 24 December two task forces from 2nd Armored's CCA encircled and captured Buissonville. Late that night a squadron of 4th Cavalry Group occupied Humain, center of the local secondary road system. Cut off from his advance guard at Conneaux, Lauchert asked Lüttwitz, his Corps commander, for permission to switch his remaining force back through Rochefort and then to drive NW to relieve the 'Conneaux Pocket' as it had already been named. However, this would have exposed 47 *Panzer* Corps' right flank and the request was turned down. But when Manteuffel, the army commander, visited Lüttwitz the next day, the Corps commander asked if he could order 2nd *Panzer* Division's trapped advance guard to fight their way back through to the south. But by December 1944 even army commanders could not authorize withdrawal. Instead he ordered *Panzer Lehr* to attack Rochefort, retake Buissonville and seize Humain to relieve 2nd *Panzer*.

Finger into mailed fist

When Hitler heard that his *Panzers* were only six miles from the Meuse on 23 December he was delighted and decided to reinforce success at once. He released 9th *Panzer* and 15th *Panzer Grenadier* divisions from his private 'Fuehrer Reserve' to free 116th *Panzer* and *Panzer Lehr* divisions from responsibility for flank protection so that they could move quickly up on either side of 2nd *Panzer* Division. This would turn the 'extended index finger' pointing at Dinant into a mailed fist to smash across the Meuse.

The Germans in the Conneaux-Conjoux area began to push out north, west and south just before dawn on Sunday 24 December. One recce column moved up a hill towards Dinant, over confident drivers pressing close to the vehicle ahead. Hull down on the rise ahead was a British Sherman tank whose crew, having stood to for three nights, were all asleep. The noise of engines in low gear and clanking tank tracks awoke them. In the resulting confusion the HE shell already in the 17pdr's breech missed the leading half-track and hit an ammunition truck farther down the column which blew up, setting fire to a fuel lorry. The tank commander and gunner, now wide awake, knocked out a Mk IV, the half-track and two more trucks before a *Jagdpanther* pushed past the blazing wrecks and opened fire. The tank commander quickly reversed behind the hill having long since learned the folly of taking on a self-propelled 88mm gun.

'Heavy armored resistance' was the report that went back to Major Cochenhausen. When British tanks knocked out



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◀ Gunther Billing (left) and Manfred Pernass die before a US firing squad. They were captured on 17 December 1944 as they neared a road-block at Aywaille and could not give the correct password. Under the terms of the Geneva Convention they were seen by a military tribunal to be spies and sentenced to death by shooting. They formed part of Otto Skorzeny's 150th Panzer Brigade, the HQ Company of which had a section that had been 'Americanised' and formed for sabotage work behind the Allied lines.

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◀ ▽ A 1.2-ton 57mm AT gun being man-handled into position during the Battle of the Bulge.

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▷ This Stuart M5A1 Light Tank first saw action in 1941 and in 1944 equipped US Cavalry and Armored Reconnaissance units. The tracked Stuarts were more useful than armored cars in the scouting roles and their 37mm gun a valuable weapon to be deployed against infantry.

another Mk IV and two Panthers he pulled his columns back out of a long-range artillery barrage from British guns west of the Meuse. He prepared to conserve fuel and defend on the high ground near Conneaux with his dug-in guns and camouflaged Panthers. They had come 60 miles in eight days and were just $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Dinant, but until more fuel and the rest of the division came up, hopefully next day, the Meuse was out of reach.

There was worse to come for the Germans when the skies cleared and the Allied air forces came into the battle after a week of being grounded by appalling weather. On 24 December 376 medium bombers dropped 700 tons of bombs at critical points in the Ardennes as well as flying hundreds of ground support missions. German communications were almost completely paralyzed.

At Ciney Gen. 'Gravel Voice' Harmon was beside himself with frustration and at 1430 on Christmas Eve he telephoned 7th Corps HQ. 'One of my patrols has just spotted Kraut tanks coiled up near Celles and the Belgians say they're out of gas. They're sitting ducks—let me take the bastards!' he growled. But the Corps commander was away visiting the hard-pressed 84th Infantry Division and Harmon knew Montgomery's orders—under no circumstances was 7th Corps to act offensively. However, soon afterwards, 'Lightning Joe' himself arrived and told Harmon he could go ahead with his attack as planned for Christmas Day. He decided that 2nd Armored Division with air and artillery support was powerful enough to destroy the Germans in the Conneaux pocket and then the rest of 2nd

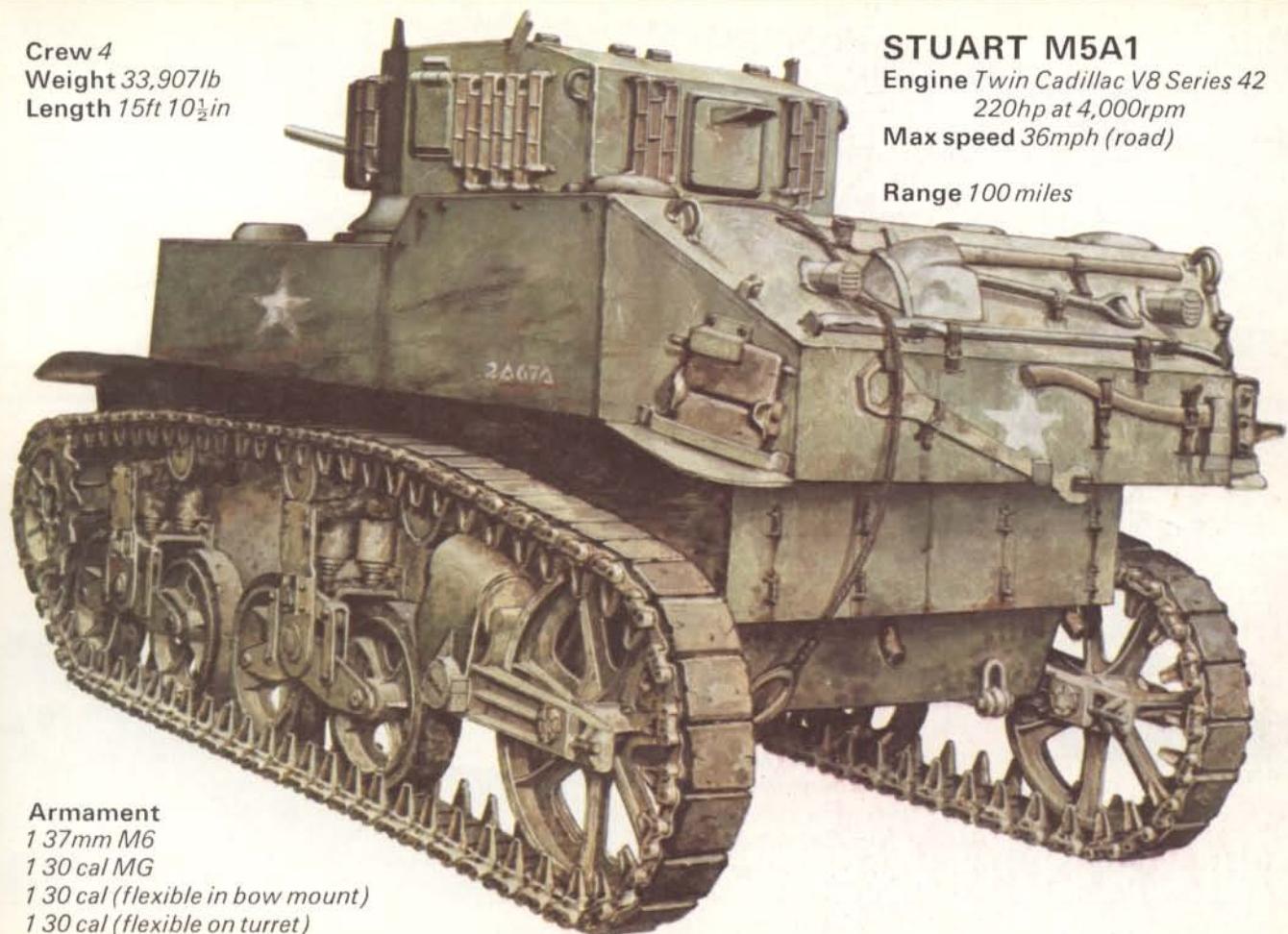
Panzer Division. Not to do so would hand the Dinant crossing to 47 Panzer Corps on a plate and he had not been ordered to pull back, only 'authorized' to do so.

The US armored division was split into two main combat commands each larger than a Panzer division. CCB which would attack 2nd Panzer's advance guard, had about 120 M4 Shermans, including some A3s with high-velocity 76mm guns, about 70 light tanks, M5A1 Stuarts, whose 37mm gun, while ineffective against German tanks, could break up infantry attacks especially when using cannister. CCB also had nearly a hundred guns of various shapes and sizes including self-propelled 105mm howitzers, 90mm and 37mm AT guns, multiple-barrelled heavy machine guns, AA guns and medium and heavy mortars. It also had its own armored infantry and armored reconnaissance.

Brigadier General Isaac D. White, commanding this great force, would have support from Corps and Divisional artillery, the British artillery west of the Meuse, a call on 'a cab rank' of American P38 Lightning fighter-bombers and of a squadron of British rocket-firing Typhoons. Also, 82nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, moving forward on his right, would link with a thrust from Dinant by some 50 British Shermans, including some with long-barrelled 17pdr guns. Against 240 Allied tanks, the wretched Cochenhausen had only 60 AFVs short of fuel and ammunition, trying to economize on the little they had left.

The Allied attack frontage for Christmas Day ran east from Dinant for about 10 miles to Leignon. After a preliminary artillery bombardment, tanks and infantry would assault the

Crew 4
Weight 33,907lb
Length 15ft 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in



STUART M5A1

Engine Twin Cadillac V8 Series 42
220hp at 4,000rpm
Max speed 36mph (road)

Range 100 miles

Armament
1 37mm M6
1 30 cal MG
1 30 cal (flexible in bow mount)
1 30 cal (flexible on turret)

Conneaux pocket from the west, north and NE. On the right, CCB's 82nd Recce Battalion would support the tank battalion from the British 29th Armoured Brigade; in the center, CCB's Task Force A would advance south from the Taviet area, while, on the left, Task Force B would attack SW from the Leignon area. The objectives were the known German positions ending with an assault on Celles.

The owner of the seventeenth century chateau in Sorinnes was Captain Jacques de Villenfagne of the Belgian Army, a recent active local resistance leader. During the night before the battle he went forward with another resistance man and mapped all the German concentrations. About half an hour before dawn on a bright, clear and cloudless Christmas Day, every one of them was heavily shelled. At 0820 C Squadron of 16 Shermans from 3rd RTR, a platoon from 8th Battalion, The Rifle Brigade and a section of recce troops in carriers moved south along the east bank of the Meuse and then advanced on Boisselles. They drew fire and made a dash down a forward slope into the village losing one tank but taking it with some prisoners. Four German tanks on high ground to the NE came out of the Bois de Geauvelant and opened long-range fire. A Sherman 17pdr was maneuvered into position and returned the fire at which the *Panzers* pulled back into the woods.

The other similar-sized British force from Dinant moved to Sorinnes without opposition and joined up with 82nd Armored Reconnaissance as planned but was then told to remain in place as a whole battalion of CCB's Shermans were about to put in an attack on a large farm on a ridge

east of Foy-Notre-Dame from which tank fire had come on Task Force A's left column. The British found 'a convenient little plateau' from which to watch the action. Major Noel Bell, who commanded the company from 8th Rifle Brigade, described what they saw: 'At first all seemed peaceful on the objective and then figures started running about. Some said they were Germans, some Americans . . . and then two large tanks were seen and the confusion increased. Then a squadron of Lightnings came in and began to dive-bomb and strafe and very soon the buildings were reduced to rubble or burning. A few minutes after the planes had gone a perfectly deployed formation of at least 50 Shermans advanced very slowly almost like a drill movement with all their machine-guns blazing. There was absolutely no opposition and we were able to watch the Americans through our glasses collecting a large number of dazed prisoners.'

Jumping off at 0800, CCB's Task Force A had advanced its left column through Liroux and the Bois de Geauvelant, a large wood about half-a-mile square. This was cleared with little opposition but when the column emerged from the trees it had come under fire from the large farm east of Foy-Notre-Dame and lost three half-tracks. Task Force A's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Hillyard, called for air support and the Lightning attack was the response. It proved to be an over-enthusiastic one because, having strafed the German relief column toiling up from Rochefort, the 12 P38s gave the British tank column a going over fortunately causing only one casualty. After the air attack



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△ Tanks and half-tracks of US 3rd Armored Division which, with the 2nd, was one of the two extra-large US armored divisions with 426 instead of 269 tanks on their establishment.

◁ A Sherman tank of 3rd US Armored moves up to bolster the northern shoulder of the 'Bulge'.

▷ A StuG German assault-gren, or Sturmgeschuetz, moving up during the Ardennes offensive. German assault-gren production went up 60 per cent for this operation.



A.D.N.

Task Force A moved on but was fired on by the same Panthers which had earlier fired on the British tanks in Boisselles. Two platoons (10 tanks) of 67th Armored Regiment went forward and destroyed three Panthers and by nightfall Task Force A had reached its objective of the high ground NE of Celles.

From Leignon Task Force B advanced quickly to Conjour where it had a brief exchange of fire before taking the village. Rushing on, the task force knocked out isolated guns and tanks, and reached its objective, a ridge about three-quarters of a mile SE of Celles.

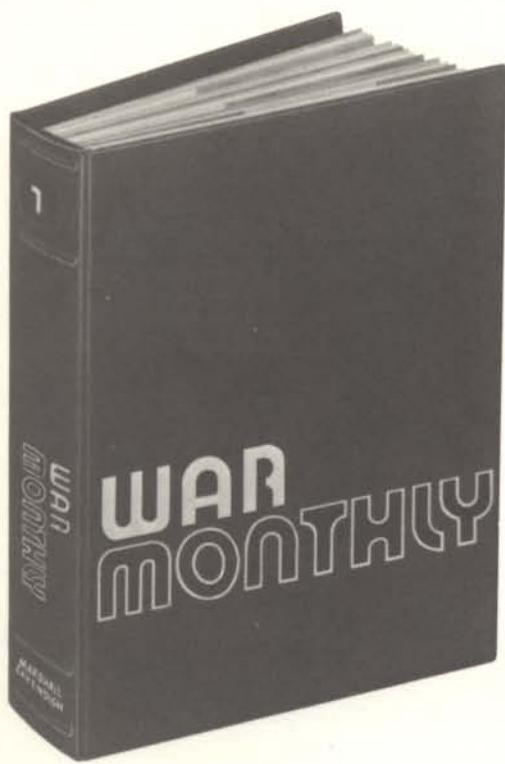
About mid-day a column of US jeeps bristling with automatic weapons hurtled down the hill from Sorinnes to Foy-Notre-Dame perhaps not realizing that there were about 200 men of 2nd Panzer's recce battalion still there. The Americans suffered a number of casualties from AT and MG fire before the British tanks from Boisselles came up to them. It was the end for these Germans, who had fought almost without a break for 10 days: the commander and 147 others were captured with most of their equipment. The western-most tank (a Panther) of the entire Ardennes offensive, knocked out by the British on Christmas Eve, lay forlornly in the parish priest's garden.

Also on Christmas Day the relief column sent by Col. Lauchert from Hargimont on a 15-mile drive south of Rochefort through Ciergnon towards Celles reached Grande Trissogne, only a mile short of the remaining Germans in Celles. The relief consisted of Lauchert's remaining battleworthy units—two Panzer companies with 18 tanks, a battalion of Panzergrenadiers, a light artillery battalion with a dozen 105mm howitzers, two companies

of engineers and some AA guns. The lead vehicle stopped when its commander saw the high ground ahead of him 'crawling with tanks' (they were Shermans of 3rd RTR's C Squadron). A few minutes later five of 2nd Armored Division's own artillery spotter planes reported this German column and marked it with red smoke. Within minutes the artillery laid down a 'medium stonk' which was followed by dive-bombing from Lightnings and rocket-firing Typhoons that ignored the red smoke which the Germans had hopefully fired on to the American positions. Four Panthers, seven Mk IVs and a number of half-tracks and other vehicles were either knocked out or abandoned. The survivors were ordered by radio to destroy their remaining vehicles, leave their wounded and make their way back to Rochefort on foot.

When CCB's two task forces finally moved into Celles they met with very little resistance and some 200 dispirited, tired prisoners were taken. The 2nd Panzer Division had been destroyed as a fighting formation and was withdrawn on Boxing Day. It had cost 2nd Armored Division only 244 casualties and 27 tanks to deliver this crushing blow. Major Cochenhausen, whose HQ in Conneaux had been ignored in Task Force B's rush forward, broke through the ring with 600 men on foot and rejoined 2nd Panzer Division at Rochefort. But he left behind the advance guard's entire equipment, 40 tanks, 840 other vehicles, all the division's artillery (74 guns) and 1,050 prisoners. Also left behind in the snow were 900 dead German tank men and armored infantry who had started westwards from the Reich with such high hopes only 10 days before.

Peter Elstob



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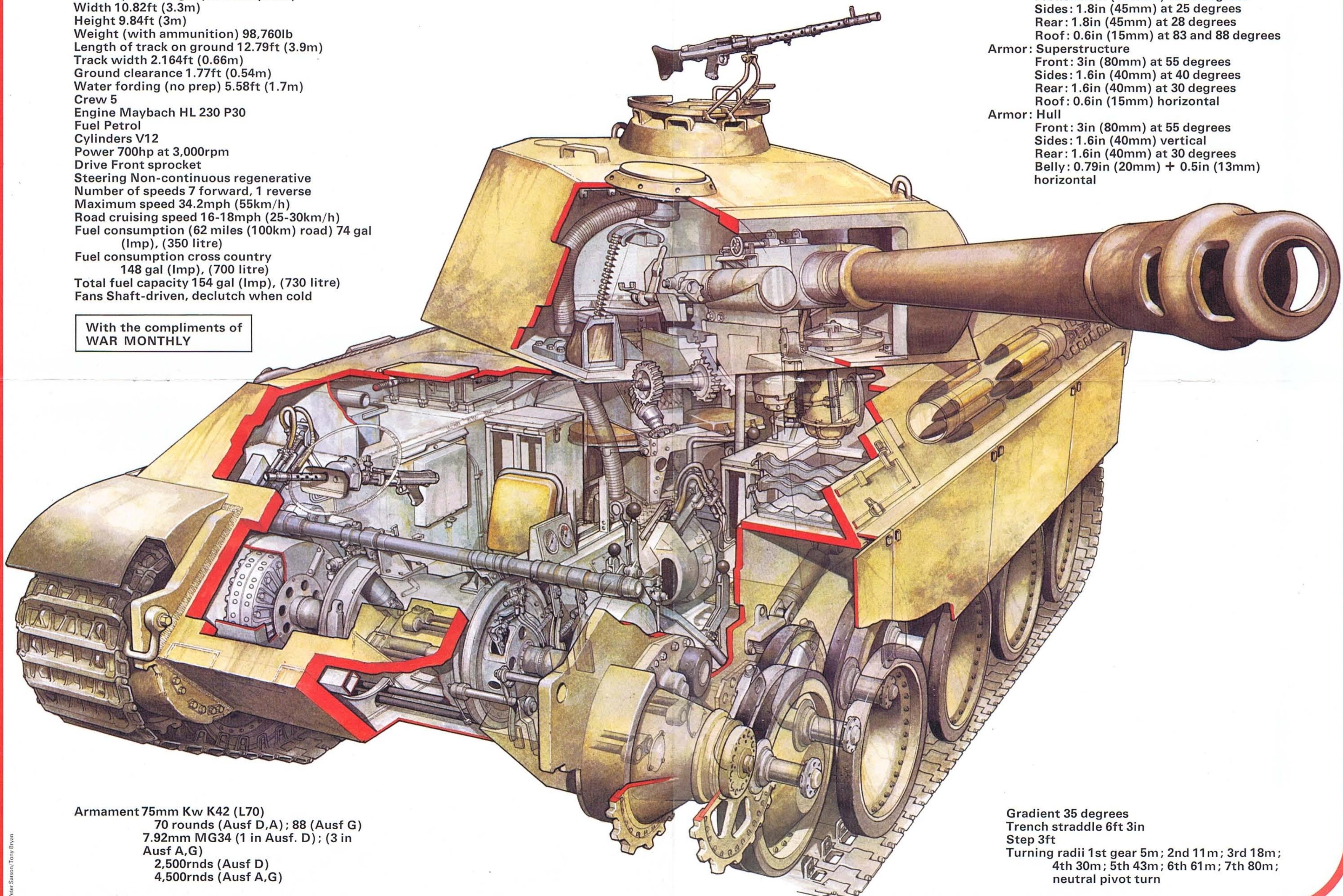
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PANTHER TANK [Panzerkampfwagen V], Ausfhrung G

Length (with gun) 28.4ft (8.65m)
 (without gun) 22.63ft (6.9m)
 Width 10.82ft (3.3m)
 Height 9.84ft (3m)
 Weight (with ammunition) 98,760lb
 Length of track on ground 12.79ft (3.9m)
 Track width 2.164ft (0.66m)
 Ground clearance 1.77ft (0.54m)
 Water fording (no prep) 5.58ft (1.7m)
 Crew 5
 Engine Maybach HL 230 P30
 Fuel Petrol
 Cylinders V12
 Power 700hp at 3,000rpm
 Drive Front sprocket
 Steering Non-continuous regenerative
 Number of speeds 7 forward, 1 reverse
 Maximum speed 34.2mph (55km/h)
 Road cruising speed 16-18mph (25-30km/h)
 Fuel consumption (62 miles (100km) road) 74 gal
 (Imp), (350 litre)
 Fuel consumption cross country
 148 gal (Imp), (700 litre)
 Total fuel capacity 154 gal (Imp), (730 litre)
 Fans Shaft-driven, declutch when cold

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Armament 75mm Kw K42 (L70)
 70 rounds (Ausf D,A) ; 88 (Ausf G)
 7.92mm MG34 (1 in Ausf. D) ; (3 in
 Ausf A,G)
 2,500rnds (Ausf D)
 4,500rnds (Ausf A,G)

Armor: Turret
 Front: 4.3in (110mm) at 10 degrees
 Sides: 1.8in (45mm) at 25 degrees
 Rear: 1.8in (45mm) at 28 degrees
 Roof: 0.6in (15mm) at 83 and 88 degrees
Armor: Superstructure
 Front: 3in (80mm) at 55 degrees
 Sides: 1.6in (40mm) at 40 degrees
 Rear: 1.6in (40mm) at 30 degrees
 Roof: 0.6in (15mm) horizontal
Armor: Hull
 Front: 3in (80mm) at 55 degrees
 Sides: 1.6in (40mm) vertical
 Rear: 1.6in (40mm) at 30 degrees
 Belly: 0.79in (20mm) + 0.5in (13mm)
 horizontal

Gradient 35 degrees
 Trench straddle 6ft 3in
 Step 3ft
 Turning radii 1st gear 5m; 2nd 11m; 3rd 18m;
 4th 30m; 5th 43m; 6th 61m; 7th 80m;
 neutral pivot turn